“CORINNA”
"CORINNA"

A Study

By "RITA"

AUTHOR OF "DAME DURDEN," "MY LORD CONCEIT,"
"TWO BAD BLUE EYES," ETC. ETC.

In Three Volumes
VOL. I.

LONDON
JOHN & ROBERT MAXWELL
MILTON HOUSE, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET
AND
35, ST. BRIDE STREET, LUDGATE CIRCUS, E.C.

[All rights reserved]
The Dramatic Rights of this Book have been Reserved by the Author.
CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.

AT ALLERHEILIGEN ........................................... 1

CHAPTER II.

"WITH VISIONS FOR MY COMPANY" ......................... 23

CHAPTER III.

"GOD'S GIFTS" ................................................ 42

CHAPTER IV.

"TRUE HEARTS ARE BETTER SO" ......................... 51
CONTENTS.

CHAPTER V.

"WHAT'S THE BEST THING IN THE WORLD?" . . . 79

CHAPTER VI.

"I BEAR UPON MY FOREHEAD" . . . . . . 96

CHAPTER VII.

"MUSIC TO HEAR" . . . . . . . . . . 113

CHAPTER VIII.

"BUT IF ALONE WE BE" . . . . . . . 133

CHAPTER IX.

"TO DREAM OF SWEETNESS IS SWEET AS TO KNOW" . 146

CHAPTER X.

"WHOSE WORDS HAD POWER" . . . . . . 162
CONTENTS.

CHAPTER XI.

"ERE THE SONG WITHIN" . . . . . 187

CHAPTER XII.

"WHAT 'ROME' MEANT" . . . . . . 213

CHAPTER XIII.

"DRIFTING" . . . . . . . 232

CHAPTER XIV.

"WOVEN OUT OF HOPE" . . . . . . 252
YOU have never been in love, Corinna."

"How do you know?"

Twilight was settling down over the dusky pine woods. Twilight filled the room where the two speakers sat—both women, both young, both gifted with beauty of no common order. One—the one who had last spoken—raised her head, and looked at her friend with soft, serious eyes. They were wonderful eyes,
that spoke out the emotions of a beautiful soul, and a strong, earnest, gifted nature.

The woman opposite met their gaze with a laughing glance. "How do I know?" she said; "oh, by a thousand things—by the way you write of love in your books. You take too fine—too high—too impersonal a view of it: by your own calmness and evenness of temper; by your indifference to men; by—oh, by a thousand things, scarcely definable, but yet weighty evidence."

A faint smile came over the beautiful, wistful face as it turned again to the open window.

"Love!" she murmured dreamily, "I do not need it. I am very happy as I am."

"No doubt," answered her companion.
"I think your life is perfect, myself. Entire freedom, ample means, a worldwide fame. No one to gainsay your will, or cross your wishes. What could the heart of woman desire more?"

"Yet you say that as if there was something wanting."

"Because it is too good to last. We poor women are always the puppets of Fate sooner or later: fate meaning, of course, a man, or several men. To me it meant the latter, and, believe me, it is much safer to take love in the plural sense than in the singular. To you—well, I have known you two years, have I not? and we have exchanged confidences on most subjects; yet you have never betrayed the smallest weakness on that point."

"Because I have none to betray."
"That is strange. I was in love at sixteen, and have been in and out of it more times than I can count since then, and you not once? It must be your own fault, Corinna."

"Perhaps so," said the girl dreamily. "Men do not interest me except as an abstract study."

"Has the consciousness of exciting admiration no effect upon you?"

"Why should it? Nature has cast me in a certain mould. I neither seek nor heed men's praise for that. It has nothing to do with wish or power of mine."

"You are above the littleness of feminine vanity," said her friend, with good-humoured satire. "Lucky woman! But are you insensible to praise of those other gifts you possess in such enviable numbers?"
A faint colour stole into the pure white cheeks of Corinna d'Avisgnes. "Perhaps not," she said; "such praise is dangerous flattery. The artist must love his creations, and to hear them praised is very sweet."

"You have had plenty of such sweets, then," said the pretty Countess Floralia. "And yet you take praise and criticism coolly enough."

"Because what I do is never half so great as what I wish to do," said the girl, with a sigh. "My ambition soars far higher than my powers of accomplishment. Each fresh trial I make brings only with it a sense of failure—of weariness—of almost contempt. What can praise be to me then!"

"You are in one of your discontented moods to-night, Corinna."
“Ah,” sighed the girl, “I fear I am. I hardly understand myself. I suppose it is impossible, in a sense, to face oneself fairly—to trace any feeling back to its origin and motive. I have tried to do that often, but failed. At times it has seemed to me as if I stood without the pale of all human sympathy, because I find no one to whom I can speak as soul speaks to soul. And yet, what I find within myself is mostly indefinable. I long for a firm hand-clasp where all seems shifting sand. I look out upon human life, and it disgusts, appals, and chills me. I see so much wrong, such cruelty, vileness, and oppression. I see the littleness of man confronting the greatness of God with an audacity that seems to call down Heaven’s judgment. I see all that is pure and noble debased by influence, by greed, by oppres-
sion. I hear one cry thrilling the length and breadth of the earth, and to it man and God seem deaf. I ask myself why can such things be, and almost I wonder why God lets us live at all.”

“Ah,” said the Countess gravely, “that is the worst of being clever. You will look under the surface. You won’t take life as it is. Of course, the world is bad—we all know that—but why make yourself unhappy about it? You can’t alter things, and you only make yourself miserable for no purpose.”

“I ought not to be that—in a positive sense: I, who have scarcely known sorrow. Yet—if I did not think—” She broke off abruptly. “Sometimes I fear my mind grows morbid, that it preys upon itself, that it exaggerates outward circumstances.”

“All of which, in plain, common-sense
words, means that you ought to live a woman's life, not a nun's," interrupted her friend. "It is unnatural. You should have love—sympathies—ties—even sorrow, for that would bring you nearer to humanity. What is the use of living in so exalted an atmosphere, of being blind and deaf to the devotion your womanhood would inspire? You make me think always of that English poet's words:

"Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height,
What pleasure lives in height (the shepherd sang),
In height and cold, the splendour of the hills?
But cease to move so near the heavens. . . ."

Of course, he is right. Love is frozen on the mountain tops. You must come down to be thawed, and become human and rational if you wish to be happy. No life is livable that is not lovable."

The girl was silent. Her eyes rested
on the beautiful scene before her—on the grand ruins of the once famous abbey, framed in by the dense woods of the Schwarzwald, on the rugged clefts of rock and the tumbling waters, and the lovely lake with its surface silvered by the rising moon.

"Were the monks wiser than we, I wonder?" she murmured dreamily. "In a retreat like this, life must have been tranquil and pure indeed."

"Oh, as for that," laughed the little Countess, "life is very much what we wish to make it. And if all the naughty stories are to be believed, the monks had a good share of the frailties and immoralities of the outer world. It is only your poets and dreamers who find nature charming for long together. The stillness of woods and the sound of waters are very pleasant for a time, but I must say the stir
and bustle of human life are more interesting. But, then, I am very commonplace."

"You are not that at all, dear Countess," said the girl gently. "Otherwise—"

"Otherwise I could not be your friend, Corinna," interposed the other quickly. "Two years of each other, and we have not even quarrelled. Yet the world refuses to believe in women's friendships!"

"The world!" said the girl contemptuously. "Why speak of it here—or to-night? It looks a very poor exchange for the beauty and serenity of such scenes as these."

"True," answered the Countess, with a little sigh. "I suppose it is stupid to care for crowds, and excitement, and jewels, and admiration. But, after two years—"

"Are you weary already of our com-
pact?" asked Corinna quickly. "Do not hesitate to say so."

The impulsive little Italian threw herself at her feet. "Dearest one, your words sound like a reproach. Tired!—no. But, you see, you have a mind, and that gives you employment. I—I am only a poor little butterfly, flitting from one thing to another, resting on none. If I had genius, now——"

"You wrong yourself, dear Countess," said the girl gently. "You are very clever, but you are restless. If you gave to one single thing you take up the zeal and enthusiasm you fritter away on a dozen, I think there would be little need to question the possession of genius."

"Some writer says, 'genius is obligation,'" laughed the pretty little woman, rising to her feet and looking out over
the dark, dim aisles of the pine woods. "In that case I possess none. I paint a little, I sing a little, I play a little. I love art, and I can recognise it under most shapes. As for the rest, I am utterly and entirely frivolous, and I think I love no one but myself, and—you."

"I often wonder why you should love me," said the girl, rising also and standing there in the dim light, a tall, slender figure, outlined against the silver shadows that blended so strangely and mystically within and without the room. "I thought when we made our compact you would soon weary of it. This wandering life, that is at times so lonely, seems a life quite unsuited to one so brilliant and accomplished as yourself. With me it is different. The world and I have nothing in common except the fame it has chosen to give me."
“And which you shun and avoid,” said her friend. “Why did you stand up, my dear? You make me look such a dwarf.”

Corinna laughed as she glanced down at the graceful, petite figure by her side. “There is no one to draw invidious comparisons between us,” she said affectionately. “We are never likely to be rivals, I am sure.”

“I suppose not,” said the pretty, vivacious Southerner, raising her dark, liquid eyes admiringly to that noble face with its soft harmonious tints and mobile lips, which made Corinna’s beauty more appealing than striking. “The same man would never admire us both. What a tragedy, though, if he did! It would be a situation for your books, cara, would it not? Do you know you don’t dissect humanity skilfully
enough. And yet it seems to me that if you have an 'experience,' there will be a total uprooting of this calmness of your nature. Its purity—its content—its lofty flights will perish. I wonder who will be the gainer by the change."

"Don't prophesy anything so terrible," said the girl, with a slight shiver, "I don't want any change; I am quite content."

"Are you? Well, that is an enviable condition of mind. But one day when Sir Galahad comes riding by"—she paused meaningly.

"I think Sir Galahad would have no charm for me," smiled the girl. "He was too colourless and characterless a knight for a woman to admire. We want something more human."

"You to say that!" laughed the Countess. "Do you know what humanity means
for a man? A great deal more than *tasting* of the tree of good and evil. To be human is not to walk between narrow lines, but rather to be a keen student of the diverse weaknesses, vices, and virtues of humanity. The most successful student in that art is not often the best man, but he is undoubtedly the most dangerous."

"What a homily," laughed Corinna. "No need to accuse you of want of experience, Nina. Did you pay as heavily for it as you seem to think I shall do?"

A sudden shadow crept over the bright face of the Countess.

"Heavily enough," she said. "No need to talk of that now. I can still enjoy life—in a way; but it has distractions now, not illusions; excitement, not dreams; memories, not hopes. And I have only myself to blame."
Corinna looked at her quickly. It was not often that the little Countess spoke so earnestly, or that her bright face wore so dark a shadow.

"And it was all so foolish," she went on presently, with a mirthless little laugh. "Sometimes I have thought I should like to tell you, Corinna, only I know you will despise me."

"Why should I do that, Nina?" asked her friend quietly. "Do you suppose I cannot sympathise with weakness and sorrow because my own life flows on so placidly and holds so little pain?"

"It was not exactly weakness, it was really wrong," murmured the little Countess apologetically. "As I have begun I had better go on and tell you all. I had a lover once——" She paused.

"Once?" echoed Corinna amusedly.
"My dear, are you quite sure; only—once?"

"He was too good for me," went on Madame Nina, disregarding her friend's query. "He was—in fact, my dear, he was a true man. I used my power over him as a woman uses it. I treated his earnestness as though it were not the outcome of a nature too noble and too brave to stoop to the follies and coquetteries of mine. I knew he loved me. I knew I—loved—him. At times a vision of such wonderful happiness came to me that I grew dazzled with its beauty. Well, at this time another admirer appeared on the scene—a man of whom Raoul grew inordinately jealous. As for me, I don't believe he cared for me. I certainly did not care for him. I was rich, and, in a way, the fashion, and he followed the stream, and, being gifted,
and popular, and admired, I did not object to the prestige his attentions gave me. About this time all Paris was raving about a grand fancy fair, to be held at the Hôtel de Saxe, in aid of a military hospital. I, of course, had a stall, and—rather to the disgust of Raoul—I insisted on selling only cigars. The day came. The affair was going off brilliantly. My stall was the centre of attraction, and at night it was lit up with Japanese lanterns and coloured lamps, and, as a matter of course, was besieged by the men. Raoul was there, but he looked gloomy and ill at ease. As for me, I fear I flirted desperately; but, then, I did it from the most philanthropic motives. I wished to gain a large sum for the charity, and in a good cause one must make sacrifices. At last somebody suggested that, if I would but
kiss the cigars, they would fetch twenty francs apiece. Raoul was beside me. He looked at me sternly. 'You will do nothing of the sort,' he said. 'It is very well for the actresses and the belles petites to degrade themselves in such fashion, but a lady owes something to herself and her position, even if not to her sex.' His authoritative tone angered me. I could never stand being ordered to do anything.

At that moment my Russian admirer appeared. He wanted some cigars. I took one out of its box. 'Ten francs,' I said. Then, looking at Raoul, I touched it with my lips, and, laughing, held it out. 'Twenty now,' I said, 'for charity.' 'I would give you fifty, Madame, under such circumstances,' he said. But Raoul clenched his hand and looked at me like an offended Jupiter. My dear, I sold all the cigars,
but—I never have seen him from that date to this, and I feel—"

"Yes, dear Nina," said Corinna pityingly, in that expressive pause, that might have been filled with tears or sighs.

"I feel," repeated the Countess, and she laughed as merrily as ever, "that I detest the very name of—charity."

Corinna rose.

"Come," she said. "Let us go out. It will do us good after the nonsense we have been talking. See, the garden is quite bright with moonlight, and quite deserted. We will tell them to bring our supper out there under the trees, and be unconventional as usual. Come."

"With all my heart," agreed the little Countess. "We have been too serious. It must be the fault of the monks. How ghostly the old abbey looks! One almost
expects to see a group of them come filing out, chanting their orisons."

"Hark—what is that?"

They were in the grounds of the little inn. The water of the lake rippled softly over the stones. And far up from among the heights came the clear, resonant tones of a voice chanting the Preghiera from "Masaniello."

The two women stood quite silent and listened. In that clear atmosphere the deep, rich notes were borne to them fully and distinctly through the peace and stillness of the warm and tranquil night.

They did not speak. A glance told what they felt, and how entirely the music seemed in harmony with their surroundings. It mingled with the ebb and flow of the waters—the sigh of the tremu-
lous leaves. It came nearer—nearer—then ceased as suddenly as it had begun, dying like the notes of a bell off the silence that seemed throbbing with its echoes.

"Look," whispered the Countess, and pointed to the road, lying white and solitary in the starlight. A shadow fell upon it, the shadow of a horseman advancing slowly towards the inn.

"He is coming here," said the little Italian, and laughed with pretty, gleeful mischief. "Who knows, after all, it may be Sir Galahad!"
CHAPTER II.

With visions for my company
Instead of men and women.

E. Barrett Browning.

The table was drawn up under the linden trees.

The two ladies were well known at Mittenmaier's, where they had been staying more than a week. Their manners were considered eccentric by the stolid-minded Germans, but they were both beautiful and generous, and the eccentricity mattered little in comparison with facts so important.
They were not ordinary tourists, that was evident; and though they were rich, they travelled with no attendants. In fact, they were somewhat of a mystery to the people of the inn.

Piles of fruit and flowers lay on the snowy cloth. A dish of the dainty, delicate-flavoured trout from the famous lake had just been placed before them. A long-necked flask of Rhine wine stood invitingly beside a crystal flagon of water. Overhead in the clear sky shone the full, radiant rays of the August moon—a royal lamp to light the scene and give it a softened and subdued effect. The two friends sat down to their supper.

"It is better than the interior," said the Countess. "A German gasthof is certainly a living illustration of the doctrine of equality. Our tourist friends are not in
great force to-night, however. We seem to have the garden to ourselves."

"It is early—comparatively," answered Corinna. "They will be here before we have finished, I suppose. Ah! you boasted too soon. There is one already."

"Sir Galahad," murmured the Countess. "There, they have taken his horse—he comes this way. Bah! what a disappointment! An Englishman!"

Corinna laughed. "In what a tragic tone you say that, Contessa mia. How can his nationality affect us?"

"He will stare at us—he will wonder—he will ask the Kellner who and what we are. He will think, being alone and unprotected, we cannot be quite—proper. He will make advances—he will be altogether odious, like his countrymen and women. I know—I know."
"You have a great prejudice against the English," said Corinna, as she leant back in her chair and glanced indifferently at the new-comer, who had taken a seat at an adjoining table. She spoke in French, which was her native language, though Italian and English were equally familiar to her.

"I have," said the Countess Floralia. "The few specimens I have met have never impressed me favourably. No doubt they are an estimable people—as a people; but, as individuals, I call them detestable."

"Dear Nina," murmured Corinna, leaning forward for a moment, "it is just possible that this stranger may understand what you are saying. If so, he won't feel flattered. Let us change the subject. See how he is watching us."

The individual in question, a tall, grave, powerful-looking man, was certainly ob-
serving the two ladies somewhat scrutinisingly. He was a fair type of the ordinary Englishman—not handsome, yet far from plain; square-cut face, heavy brows; a tawny, drooping moustache shading the mouth; with calm, gray-blue eyes that looked men fully in the face, having nothing to fear or conceal on the part of their owner. A man singularly earnest and simple-minded—brave, honest, and sincere; a man with nothing romantic or interesting about him, and to whom life was more serious than idle. Yet even to his equable and prosaic temperament there seemed a charm in this tranquil, shadowy place, and his eyes rested on that face under the linden trees in almost unwilling admiration of a picture so perfect.

The Countess was right. He was saying to himself, "Who can they be?"
That well-regulated, evenly-balanced mind of his had a horror of anything unconventional in woman. He liked them to be hedged in by propriety—to be well-bred, beautiful, entertaining, but—no more. Thirty years of a blameless English life might have been to blame for his somewhat narrow strictures—a life spent in calm, contemplative serenity—a useful life—yet one that had held no temptation and no excitement, and called forth no deep emotions in his nature.

He looked at that face again, and yet again. He thought it a singularly attractive one and full of character. The head was rather large for a woman, but the beautiful dusky hair crowned it with such a glory and luxuriance that his eyes forgot to be critical. The moonlight gave an added purity and softness to the pure-
tinted complexion, and the face, with its changeful expressions, seemed to gather a fresh charm with each. Gilbert Brandon called himself a student of human nature, and a successful physiognomist. He was fond of tracing character by those external signs which nature supplied—he believed them infallible. Perhaps they are until feeling blindfolds the senses.

There are times when the would-be magnetiser finds himself powerless, when the eyes which his own seek awake feelings that are beyond control or explanation. But few men could have looked into the violet-gray orbs of Corinna D'Avisgnes or watched the expressions of her face without feeling that a spell beyond mere physical beauty lay in the depths of the one, and gave such charm to the other.

"If he stares much longer I shall speak
to him," said the Countess, in Italian, to her friend.

"Pray do not," pleaded the other. "He is an Englishman; he will not understand—"

"What—or who? I can risk that. It would trouble me very little what he thought. All this time he is saying, 'Who the deuce can they be?' Let me put him out of his misery."

Scarce waiting for response, she turned to the stranger: "A beautiful scene, is it not, Monsieur? You have but just arrived?"

He started and raised his hat.

"Yes," he said; "I rode over from Achern. I should have been here earlier but that my horse cast a shoe. I am too late now for the waterfalls; I must wait till to-morrow."
He spoke frankly and politely. Had she been an Englishwoman, he would have wondered at her addressing him; but in a foreigner all things are excusable. He unbent from his insular stiffness, and talked on for a few moments without reserve.

She smiled, and answered, and described the country around with accuracy and familiarity. Presently she said, "I feel your debtor for the serenade you gave us as you came down the mountain path. My friend and I were listening here, and the effect was indescribably charming."

"I—I beg your pardon," he said stiffly. "There is some mistake. I am not musical in the least, and I certainly should not dream of giving vent to my vocal powers—if I possessed them—in the manner you describe."
"Would you not?" said the pretty Italian, looking somewhat puzzled. "Why so? It is nothing to be ashamed of that one can sing. And it was a glorious voice."

"Artists, I suppose," thought the Englishman. "Hence the freedom. I wish the other would speak, though. I should like to hear her voice."

But "the other" leant back on her chair with dreamy, absorbed eyes, that sought anything but that calm, watchful face of whose intent gaze she was quite unconscious. "I heard it also," he said presently. "I think its owner is a fellow traveller of mine. We have met at different places on the route from Köln. I lost sight of him at Baden. I suppose he is coming here."

"I hope so," said the Countess. "He
sang like an artist. I suppose he is one?"

"I think not," said her new acquaintance, doubtfully. "He is a singular man. I thought at first he was a Russian, then an Italian; I am still in doubt. But he is a charming companion."

"A cosmopolitan like myself, perhaps," laughed the Countess. "A citizen of the world. The position has its charms and its inconveniences; yet it is a pleasant one, taken all in all."

"Madame would doubtless make any position a pleasant one," said Brandon, with a smile at the piquante, brilliant face turned towards him in the moonlight. "She owns, doubtless, the true art of enjoying life possessed by her countrymen—romance and adaptability."

"Have you discovered my nationality?"
asked the Countess. "I usually puzzle people on first acquaintance. They can't make out whether I am French or Italian. I possess more of the former elements than the latter, I fancy. My mother was French, and I have lived half my life in her country."

"And yet you speak English so well. May I ask if you have ever honoured my country with your presence?"

"Not often," she said, laughing. "I don't like it, or—the people. I am very frank, you see."

"You have been a great traveller, Madame?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Assez bien! I have seen most places worth seeing. I have tried Court life and cottage. I have conspired, and I have milked cows. Can you reconcile the different phases of existence?"
He laughed, more uneasily than mirthfully now. She detected the false ring very quickly, but it only amused her. Of course, all English people were so raides, so prudish; what was out of the common must of necessity be wrong.

"Yes," she went on, with a malicious enjoyment of the situation; "I do not care for beaten tracks. I was free to follow my own inclinations, and I did; and now chance brings me from Austria to Allerheiligen. You, I suppose, Monsieur, are making the prescribed tour of the Rhine and Northern Germany as laid down by Baedeker?"

He coloured slightly, and bowed with grave stiffness. "I am. This is my first experience of life abroad."

"I wonder if it will amuse you, or if, like most of your countrymen, you will
expect English customs and manners dressed up in a foreign garb, and grumble unceasingly. I wonder you have not done so already, because they have not brought your supper. Perhaps you are reserving it for the cucumber soup and inevitable sausage."

"I should be ungrateful if I had even felt inclined to grumble at a delay which you have made so pleasant, Madame."

"Ah!" she said, smiling, "that is not English; but it is always safest not to question the truth of a compliment. And here is the Kellner at last. You will find one thing inevitable at Allerheiligen, Monsieur, and that is—trout."

"There are worse things than that, Madame; instance the sausage with which you threatened me. Are you going?"
Something like disappointment was in his voice. It amused her.

"We have finished our supper long ago," she said, rising. "It would be cruel to interrupt yours. Good-bye, Monsieur; and think what an odd caprice it is for two women to be supping alone under the linden trees of a public inn at nine o'clock at night."

She nodded gaily and moved away. Corinna looked grave and rebuking. Her friend's whims and manners often troubled her. But she usually let her run on unchecked as the surest method of ending each new caprice.

"What will he think?" she murmured, as the little Countess linked her arm in hers, and they entered the inn and went up to their own apartments—the best that the place afforded.
"What he pleases," laughed her friend.
"How can it matter to us? He will leave to-morrow. But I am disappointed. I wish it had been the singer, though really, for an untravelled Englishman, he was not bad. I wonder who he is?"

"You should have asked him," said Corinna, ironically.

"There was no need," laughed the Countess, good-humouredly. "We shall see in the visitors' book to-morrow, unless he writes like that other man, 'Civis Romanum sum.' That will be too bad, for he will know us, and we shall not be equally satisfied."

"I don't think there was anything very interesting about him," said Corinna, languidly.

They had reached their room, and the
windows were open. She moved slowly across and seated herself in a chair beside them. The Countess followed her.

"How different we are," she said. "Your eyes go to the stars, mine to the ground. Corinna, look!" she added, excitedly, "Sir Galahad has come, after all. He is talking to the Englishman. What a pity we came in so soon?"

Corinna looked calmly down at the garden. Two figures were standing by the table where the stranger's supper had been placed. They were talking eagerly. Their tones reached their ears, though not their words.

"I don't think it a pity," she said, gravely. "They have nothing to do with us, and, pardon me, dear Nina, but I think sometimes you talk too freely to
strangers. It does one harm, in a way, and, situated as we are, we ought to be careful."

"Cara mia," laughed the Countess Floralia, merrily. "Situated as we are is just the reason why we may snap our fingers at the world, and dance over the head of all the proprieties if we choose. We have ceased to live for Society."

Corinna laughed outright. The musical, silvery peal echoed out through the open windows and reached the ears of the two men under the linden trees.

They both looked up.

"He is very handsome," said the Countess, eagerly. But Corinna blushed and turned away.

"They will think we wanted to attract their attention," she said, with displeasure.
"And what does it matter whether they are handsome or not? They are men."

"I only spoke of one," said the Countess, closing the window.
CHAPTER III.

"God’s gifts put man’s best dreams to shame."

WHO was "Corinna?"

People had almost ceased to ask that question now, though once its constant reiteration had been a sort of stepping-stone to the fame its answer had obtained.

Corinna D’Avisghes — known to the world only as "Corinna"—was an authoress and a poet. A woman still young, and of great gifts; and, stranger still, of great personal attractions.

Genius in either man or woman is
not often allied to beauty. Nature is not prodigal of external charms when the mind can lay claim to superior powers. But in this instance, nature had been very generous. Corinna D’Avisgnes was beautiful in the highest sense of the word—beautiful of nature, of person, of mind.

If she had faults, they were very lovable ones. People called her proud, but she was chiefly indifferent—unsympathetic, because she was only serious—unconventional, because she soared above the littleness, and meanness, and frivolity with which the world surrounds itself, and claimed an independence of thought and action that was termed eccentric, and stigmatised privately as improper. She had a man’s fearlessness and courage, yet all a woman’s gentleness and pride. She was intolerant of pettiness,
of hypocrisy, of shams, in any shape or form. She spoke the truth fearlessly, and upheld her convictions with logical ability. Therefore she had few friends and many enemies—a great deal of admiration, a great deal of wonder, and very little love. She cared too little for men to put forward any feminine arts of allurement or attraction. Flattery she disliked, to admiration she was indifferent. Her ideal world was peopled with shadows, but shadows that pleased her more than the living puppets who moved around her. She was ever seeking for a perfection she never found, and disappointments chilled her and—as the Countess Floralia said—held her apart from the sympathies, sorrows, and joys of a common humanity. She turned for consolation to the abstract instead of the
real. Whether she found it, she never confessed.

Her early life had been a very lonely one, and not in any way remarkable. Her father was the last descendant of an ancient Huguenot family. He had fallen in love with a beautiful Italian singer, who, for his sake, had left the stage and allied herself to his fallen fortunes. Corinna was their only child. Her mother died at her birth, and the grief and shock turned the Comte D'Avisgnes into a stern, embittered man.

He lived the life of a recluse, he avoided even his child; and she grew up in loneliness and complete isolation from all youthful companionship. The curé of the village educated her. Books were her only recreation, and her mind, as it expanded and grew enriched, grew also too serious
and self-contained for one of her sex and years.

Born of a gifted and studious race, and possessed herself of great natural abilities, learning was to her an inexhaustible delight.

At eighteen years of age she found herself alone in the world. Her father died suddenly, leaving her heiress to his half-ruined old dwelling, his vast library, and but very little else.

Her life had been simple—unclouded—peaceful. Now she found herself confronted with responsibilities and troubles. She seemed absolutely friendless, but that gave her little concern. The old curé, searching through her father's papers, discovered the address of some people in Paris with whom he had once been on terms of friendship, and, out of compassion to the girl, he wrote and told them of her forlorn situation. One
lady, the Marquise de la Rennecourt, invited Corinna to Paris, and promised to introduce her to society next season. The girl accepted the invitation, because she was desirous of seeing the famous capital, but in two months' time she returned to her old home, declaring nothing would induce her to enter society as the Marquise desired.

She lived on in her tumble-down château, with the old servants who had been in the family since her father's boyhood. She read more, studied more, thought more than ever. Her mind was teeming with vivid imaginings. Her soul fired with a sudden ambition. She confided her secret to no one till her first work had been accepted by a firm of Paris publishers, and the name of the girl writer who signed herself "Corinna" startled the world with wonder and almost unwilling admiration.
For three years she lived this solitary life, studying more than many men, for now she had means to procure herself any teachers she desired. She learnt German and Italian, that the lore of both countries might be more readily pursued. She went to Paris to hear art lectures, and make herself acquainted with the works of men whose names were to her an embodiment of all that was great and noble. But to all the entreaties of her fashionable friends she turned a deaf ear. The chatter, the fuss, the frivolity of society seemed to her poor and contemptible beside the serenity and purity of the studious life she loved. In vain the Marquise urged; in vain other friends, springing up mushroom-like at the sound of her fame, besought her to take the fruits of celebrity. She cared little for public adulation, but a great
deal for art and privacy. That she was a beautiful woman she never thought. That she was a successful writer pleased her far more; yet her ambitions were too lofty to be satisfied by the praise awarded. She had not vanity enough for success to spoil her. She possessed that truest test of artistic merit—humility. The more she achieved, the higher soared her desires. At times like these the voice of the world seemed a profanity. The more celebrated her name became, the more she sought to withdraw herself from that fierce light which the world throws upon genius, like a sun that seeks at once to reveal its perfections and its flaws.

She came but rarely to Paris, and availed herself still more rarely of the invitations she received or the society that her selection would have honoured. But in one
of those rare visits she met the Countess Floralia, herself a celebrity in some measure, by reason of her marvellous voice, her quick wit, her charming manners, and her many eccentricities. Two people more unlikely to become friends could scarcely have been chosen, yet, nevertheless, the Countess took a staunch and tender interest in this brilliant, gifted girl whose the world would have adored had she permitted.

They met constantly, agreed perfectly, and Corinna even granted her the rare privilege of a visit to her old château by the bright Oise waters. From the Countess Floralia came that first suggestion of travel which the two friends were now carrying out.

"You should see other countries," she told Corinna; "you cannot learn human life from books." And after some delibera-
tion they went away together, with an agreement that they were to avoid all society, all notoriety, and to travel as unostentatiously as possible. Two years had been spent in this manner, and Corinna confessed they had been both pleasant and useful to her. They had been to Spain; from thence recrossed the Pyrenees, and visited all places of note or interest in France. They wintered in Italy, spent their second summer in Switzerland, and intended to devote the months from August to October to Germany.

They had left their maid and courier at Baden, and come to Allerheiligen for what the Countess Florialia termed one of their "pauses." These pauses were made when any place unusually picturesque or romantic took Corinna's fancy. There she roamed about, and dreamt and wrote, and
took all necessary notes, until the place and its surroundings made a picture in her brain, to be recalled and used as memory or fancy should hereafter dictate.

It was a charming life, and she had enjoyed it more than she had ever thought possible when first the plan was mooted. In a way, too, it had done her good. She was less serious, less self-absorbed, and more human. She had seen the light and dark sides of life in great cities, as well as its romance, and peace, and picturesqueness, in the hearts of green woods and mountain solitudes. Yet, still, it was the peace and solitude that allured her most, because, as her friend had told her, no great human sympathies had as yet been stirred to life within her. She looked out on sin and passion, and love and pain,
as abstract things, that saddened, but, yet, had never touched herself.

Therefore, they grieved and shocked her, and made her turn with renewed tenderness to the simplicity and freshness, the grandeur and peace of nature. Here all was unspoilt by hand of time, or so-called "improvements" of man. And nature to her was one unending poem, of which she never wearied, from which she drank fresh inspiration, yet found the fountain but more sweet, and pure, and inexhaustible.

Yet, to be a woman, and gifted, and beautiful, and unloved, seems somewhat of an anomaly.

Corinna had lived to be twenty-five years of age, and her heart was untouched, and her soul as innocent as when she had
dreamed her childish dreams by the banks of her favourite river.

The world had been full of wonder to her then—it was full of wonder still. If at times she felt a craving for answering sympathy—if her soul longed to speak of itself and the strange thoughts which thrilled it with rapture, or saddened it with pain, she poured them out in her books, and so gave herself relief, and her ideal creations contented her as yet.

Would it be so always?

She had never asked herself that question, never considered whether it is possible for any woman's life, however gifted, to hold itself apart from human interests, from human desires, from the common bond of love, and suffering, and woe, that unites all humanity, and makes
it equal through the material elements of a common weakness.

Vague desires at times had touched her as she saw two lovers stand hand in hand in the summer moonlight, or looked at the love in a mother's eyes as she held her child to her breast, or heard some strain of passionate music, or gazed on some great picture where love and woe spoke out their bitter truth. At times like these she could no longer lose herself in the impersonal, and her heart would ache with some prescience of suffering, some dread of the Unknown, to which, all unconsciously, her own life might be drifting; and all the elements of faith and imagination, and all the gifts of genius, seemed powerless to satisfy her then.
But these feelings were rare, and the outcome of too vivid imaginings, which she sternly repressed. The consciousness of evil, which is inseparable from all knowledge, pained and perplexed her, and she avoided it as much as lay in her power.

She thought herself happy, because she was, as yet, at peace. Perhaps she was wise. It is the nearest approach to happiness that mortals should expect or desire.
CHAPTER IV.

"True hearts are better so."

The Countess Floralia objected to early rising. Corinna liked it. She loved the cool gray dawns and the rosy summer mornings, with the wind blowing fresh and keen over the flower-filled grasses, and shaking the dew from the stirring boughs.

At five o'clock she was out, and took her way through the pine woods towards Rippoldsau. The woods were cool and dusk, and full of fragrant odours. The sound of the falling waters of the Sieben
Bütten reached her ears from time to time. Once, as she came to a turn in the winding road, she saw a figure before her, and recognised it as that of the Englishman who had come to Allerheiligen the preceding night. She slackened her pace, not wishing to overtake or to be seen by him; but she noticed that he walked very slowly, and she grew impatient.

"Perhaps I had better return, and go down to the falls," she said to herself, and impulsively turned back from the road and went down the steep path to the valley beneath.

At the second "Rondel" she paused again. A man was standing there sketching. The noise of the waters deadened her footsteps—he did not hear her approach. Thinking it best not to notice him, she
walked on rapidly. As she passed her dress caught in a trailing branch. She paused an instant to disengage it. The action brought her face to face with the sketcher. She noted that he was singularly handsome—fair enough to be an Englishman, yet with nothing English about his air and aspect. He stood aside and slightly raised his hat; then she moved on with swifter steps, and he resumed his sketch.

"Another tourist, I suppose," Corinna thought; "or was it—the singer?"

She remembered again the thrilling, soul-stirring tones of that beautiful voice. She seemed to hear it above the hollow thunder of the waters, the glad songs of the birds, as they flew from bough to bough. Music was a passion with her, though she neither executed nor inter-
preted it herself. Her ear was correct, and her taste faultless, but she refused to do anything at all rather than do it imperfectly.

She went on, walking more slowly now. The scene had grown familiar to her, and she scarcely noticed it for once. She felt tempted to look back, and then felt her face grow warm as she resisted the inclination. Had she not done so, she would have seen the artist watching her intently. He gave her a man's genuine appreciation of a beautiful figure and a graceful walk. She only wore a simple gray dress of some soft, clinging stuff, and at her throat and waist were knots of black velvet. Corinna was one of those rare women who can afford to be utterly independent of dress, and yet are bound to excite remark. The slight,
supple form and graceful carriage were well suited to the simple, almost severe style she affected—a style which was at once the despair and envy of her volatile friend, who could never have dreamt of adopting it, and therefore stigmatised it as "unfashionable."

Could there be a greater defect in eyes feminine?

The man who had laid aside his pencil to watch her thought he had never seen a woman walk so well. "I wonder who she is?" he said to himself. "Is she staying here? I suppose so, otherwise she would not be walking down to the inevitable Büttenstein."

He resumed his work again—he thought he would wait until she returned. He would like another glance at that striking face and graceful form.
"So few women can make themselves look even tolerably attractive when travelling," he soliloquised. "They either appear like fashionable dolls to whom all natural movement is a martyrdom, or else appalling frights in garments that are no less terrible in fit than in colour. That girl was perfect. I should say she was French, only that her face was too grave and serious. A tinge of coquetry seems inseparable from the Gallic origin."

The time passed on.

When his sketch was finished, the girl had not reappeared. He grew tired of waiting, and retraced his steps, thinking he would explore the ruins.

The place was unfamiliar to him. He was not aware of any danger connected with it; therefore, when he was ascending
one of the highest points, he was startled to find the ground giving way. At the same moment a cry reached him. Someone was calling to him to come back. He sprang from the crumbling rocks with the lightness and ease of a mountaineer. A short distance off he saw the gray-robed figure of the girl who had passed him in the valley an hour previously. “Ah, Monsieur,” she cried, breathlessly, “you must not go there. The ruins are very dangerous. Only a few years back a gentleman lost his life by falling from them, and last year there was a terrible accident.”

“You are very kind to warn me,” he said, smiling at her anxious face. “The people at the inn told me to be careful, but I forgot. Not that I have any fear.
I am used to climbing, and if there is a spice of danger that only makes exploration more attractive."

"Do you not value your life more than a passing excitement?" she questioned, gravely. "That seems foolhardy."

The rebuke astonished him. He had fancied that all women admired what was daring, impulsive, bold.

"I deserve your rebuke, I have no doubt," he said, "and I am your debtor for the warning you gave me. The ground was very insecure. Perhaps you are more familiar with these spots than I am!"

"I have been staying here little more than a week," she answered, with a simple directness that seemed unconscious of his curiosity. "It is very beautiful."

"Yes," he agreed. "I have travelled
in most countries, but this spot could challenge comparison with many overrated beauties."

She had not meant to be drawn into conversation with this stranger, still less into any exchange of confidences. That was more in the Countess's line than in hers. But there was a charm and grace about him—a something so natural and yet so courtly, that she scarcely knew how to break off.

"I saw you going down to the falls," he said, presently. "I was endeavouring to make a sketch of them. It is difficult to form an estimate of their height from the point where I stood. Perhaps you can tell me where I could get the best view?"

"As you ascend from the valley, I think," she said. Then, with a smile,
added, "But the inevitable guide-book would tell you that."

"I happen to be without the inevitable guide-book," he answered, smiling also. "I have a horror of its directions and ostentatious advice. I like to follow the bent of my own inclinations."

"I think you are wise," she said, frankly. "If one has any taste or artistic feeling at all, they are guide enough."

Then she opened the large white sunshade in her hand, and, with a quiet bow, moved away in the direction of the inn. He felt vexed at the sudden termination of the conversation. He would have liked to talk to her longer had she given him the opportunity, but there was something about her which checked his impulse to follow her. He stood and watched her
in silence, and a little wonder mingled with his admiration.

"Is she a princess in disguise?" he thought.

When he had reached the inn he saw no more of her.

The Englishman was having his breakfast under the linden trees, and called out a request that he would join him. He did so, and talked lightly and frankly, as was his wont; but all the time his eyes turned restlessly to the windows of the inn; he felt a longing to see that calm, fair face again.

"Do you know any of the people staying here?" he asked Gilbert Brandon.

The Englishman looked up from his plate and shook his head. "There are two foreign ladies there," he said, a little re-
luctantly; "one spoke to me last night as one traveller speaks to another. I am not acquainted with their names."

"And one saved me from breaking my neck at the ruins yonder," said his companion, nodding in the direction of the abbey.

"Ah!" said the Englishman, quietly, "a dark, petite woman; bright and quick in manner!"

"On the contrary," answered the other, slowly, "she was tall and goddess-like, and somewhat reserved in manner. French to all appearance, and yet without that vivacity and esprit so essentially French."

Gilbert Brandon looked disconcerted. This man had obtained, without effort or design, the privilege he coveted. He was to leave Allerheiligen that afternoon. In all probability, he would not see this girl
again, and though he could assign no reason for the disappointment that thought occasioned, he was conscious that there was such a feeling within his breast.

Just then a great stir and bustle, a clatter of voices and loud laughter, proclaimed some new arrivals. The two men looked up from their table. They saw a party of English and Americans trooping into the inn gardens.

The men were noisy and ill-dressed, the women had touzled hair and strange dresses, and carried large waterproof cloaks.

They seized upon the tables, and talked a strange jargon to the confused waiters, and stared at the two men with undisguised curiosity.

One of the Americans was a short, bumptious little woman of some six-and-thirty years, who, from her conversation,
seemed to be a correspondent to some great New York journal.

"My!" she said, after a few plunges in and out of a dozen different subjects, "if she is here, it'll be finds, won't it? I shall interview her. I must. Think what a telling thing for the Forum—a column of description of the wonderful French authoress. Do you think I could possibly make that waiter understand what I want to know?"

"Try," said one of the young men, who had a weak voice, a faint moustache, and an enormous hat. "Talk to him in your best German, Miss Spyrl."

Nothing daunted by the shouts of laughter raised by the suggestion, Miss Spyrl did try. She plunged into an explanation, of which "Corinna" and "Comtesse," "Badischer Hof gekommen?"
"Ist sie hier?" were alone intelligible. The waiter shook his head, explaining there was no "Badischer Hof" at Allerheiligen.

The American waxed desperate and scattered her German about with still greater velocity. Her party were in convulsions; the poor Kellner looked distraught. At last, to the horror of the Englishman, he appealed to him. Would the Herr Engländer kindly explain what the honourable lady meant—it became to him impossible that he could comprehend.

Brandon somewhat stiffly addressed the lady in English, and amidst her voluble thanks and explanations learnt that the celebrated "Corinna," the French authoress, was supposed to be staying at Allerheiligen. They had learnt this at Baden, and rushed off in hopes of combining the excursion with so desirable an opportunity of seeing
and speaking to the celebrity. Would he ask the waiter if this was the case?

The question being put to that individual, he gave no positive information. "Two ladies were certainly staying there; *hohe Damen*. Their names were in the book. Should he bring it?"

"*Yah, yah, gewiss*, by all means," screamed the little American. "I'm so obliged to you, sir," she continued, to Brandon, "you can't tell. If you're any kind of a celebrity yourself, and just mention it straight away, I'll crack you up in the *Forum* so that you won't know yourself. I will so."

Brandon bowed, and declined the honour as one in no way suitable to himself. In real truth, he was very annoyed at the woman's impertinence; he was more so still when he remembered that one of the ladies he
had seen the previous night was, in all probability, the famous "Corinna" of whom the American spoke. The question was, which of the two?

Some instinct seemed to tell him that. That noble, beautiful figure rose like a picture before him—an embodiment of all that was purest and best in womanhood—such richly-gifted womanhood as hers. It seemed sacrilege to think of her mobbed, besieged by vulgar curiosity, and he felt savage with himself as the indirect cause of it.

The waiter returned with the book. Almost at the same time the two ladies themselves came out of the inn.

"Is the carriage not ready?" they asked the man.

He began to apologise. They were all so busy—so upset. Would the honour-
able ladies graciously wait but five minutes? The Countess Floralia looked impatient, and answered sharply. Corinna tried to calm her. They moved away to some distance, followed by the curious and observant eyes in the garden.

"It must be her," cried Miss Spyrle, impulsively.

"Go and ask her," urged the British youth.

This was too much for Brandon's patience. He rose to his feet. "Pardon me, Madame," he said, gravely; "in Europe we are not accustomed to such freedoms. I should advise you not to force yourself upon those ladies if you have not the least acquaintance with them."

The American looked disconcerted. "You Britishers are mighty particular,"
she said. "I shan't hurt her. Is she a friend of yours?"

In a rash moment, and thinking to benefit Corinna, Brandon answered "Yes."

"Ah, then, I guess that'll just do," said the unabashed American. "Introduce me."

Brandon was thunderstruck. To make matters worse, the Countess and her friend turned at this juncture and came towards the place where he was standing. Nina had resumed her good humour, and was chatting gaily.

"What makes these people stare so?" she said. "Oh! there is our friend of last night. Shall I bow? I suppose it won't matter. Why, I declare he is coming to us. I thought Englishmen were so diffident."

"You were too free with him last
night," said Corinna, rebukingly. "Even Englishmen require to be kept at their distance."

Brandon was close to them. He looked flushed and annoyed.

"A thousand pardons, Madame," he said, bowing low. "There are some people just arrived—Americans. You know their strange manners. They have learnt that one of the ladies staying here is the celebrated writer known as 'Corinna.'"

He stopped a moment. The flush on the beautiful, grave face told him he was correct in his surmise.

"Well, Monsieur?" said the Countess.

"It may be unpleasant for Madame," he stammered. "They—one of them—insists upon speaking. I thought I would warn you, so that if you wish to avoid them—"
"TRUE HEARTS ARE BETTER SO." 77

"Yes, yes," said Corinna, hurriedly. "It is very disagreeable. I know the woman; she was at Baden. Thank you, Monsieur. I will go within till our carriage is ready."

"And I," said the Countess Floralia, "will stay and play—Corinna. I will give the American ample reward for her trouble. She shall have something worth recording if I mistake not."

"Nina"—pleaded her friend.

"Oh, bah! my child," laughed the pretty little woman. "What does it matter? I shall do you no harm, rest assured. Monsieur, tell her I am quite ready to be introduced. I shall esteem it an—honour."

Corinna entered the inn. The Countess threw herself down on a seat.

"Ah!" said Miss Spyrle, when Brandon
returned. "I guess you thought foreigners as thin-skinned as you Britishers are. I know them better, you see. Bless you, there's nothing they like better than being made a fuss of. What! ain't you coming?"

Brandon had resumed his seat. He felt excessively annoyed.

"Excuse me," he said, stiffly; "you are at liberty to introduce yourself."

The fair American walked off, nothing discouraged.

"Sulky, I surmise," she said to herself.
CHAPTER V.

"What's the best thing in the world?
—Something out of it, I think."

LITTLE Madame Nina, as the Contessa Floralia was called by her friends, was a strange compound of warmheartedness, caprice, and eccentricity. Avowedly she believed in no one and nothing except herself, and was not even quite sure that she always did that. She had, however, a great admiration for genius and a genuine appreciation of art, even though she called the one folly, and the other imitation. She thought deep
feelings a mistake, and would have liked to laugh through life as if it were an excellent comedy had circumstances so permitted. But they had not done so, and she had suffered a fair share of life's trials and troubles, designated by herself as "worries."

She had loved a man whom she was not permitted to marry, and had married a man whom she could not love, and who was twenty years older than herself. He died when she was but four-and-twenty, and from that time she had denied herself no whim or caprice her fancy had dictated.

Her friendship for Corinna, however, was a very genuine emotion, born of real admiration for her talents, and an almost reverent wonder at the girl's pure, simple, studious life.
She was unlike all other women—certainly most unlike Madame Nina herself; yet is not that the charm of most friendships?—not "like to like, but like in difference."

"Ma chère," she cried, flashing into the room, and throwing herself into the first seat at hand. "What I have undergone for your sake! Oh, that terrible woman. Such a creature I never saw in my life!"

Then she went off into peals of silvery laughter.

"I hope she understood me," she resumed, presently. "I spoke French, and she is not very brilliant at that. She was frightfully inquisitive, and asked me about sixty questions in five minutes. When I had told her all the nonsense I could think of, she said: 'Wal, I do..."
think you geniuses are the most disappointing people I ever met. You seem to live just like anybody else.' 'Pardon, Madame,' I said, 'mais vous avez dit les choses les plus affreuses. Je comprends anglais.' She looked rather foolish, for all her 'asides' had been in English.

"'Do you?' she said. 'Then why the deuce didn't you speak it at first, instead of giving me all this trouble? Do you know I'm going to write an article on you and your works in the New York Forum?'

"'You do me great honour,' I said. 'But—works—I do not understand. I have done nothing that entitles me to fame. Will Madame kindly explain?'

"'Your books, I mean,' she said. 'I haven't read 'em, but I mean to. Are
they voluptuous? Being French, I suppose they're sure to be.'

"I looked her full in the face. 'You are labouring under some delusion, Madame,' I said, quietly. 'I never wrote a book in my life. I only wish I could.'

"'Then aren't you Corinna?' she screamed.

"'Certainly not.'

"'My!' she cried, angrily. 'And here I've been wasting my time all for nothing, and lost my breakfast; and there's the carriages, and we've no end of places to see to-day, and must see 'em too. It's all that darned Britisher. He told me you were Corinna. I guess I'll let him have a piece of my mind before I'm six seconds older.' And she went off. But I pity the poor Englishman when
she lets her tongue fly at him. Without doubt, they are terrible, these Americans."

"I hope she won't waylay us again," said Corinna, looking annoyed. "This place seems unfortunate. Undesirable acquaintances are springing up like mushrooms wherever we move."

"Ah! what does it matter?" laughed the little Countess. "It was amusing, and she was, oh! so angry!"

There came a knock at the door at this juncture. The head Kellner entered. He was distressed to annoy the honourable ladies, but, indeed, they were all in great perplexity. The new arrivals insisted on having every available conveyance they possessed. Of course, the carriage of the honourable and high-born ladies was excepted, but the two gentle-
men were so put out. There was no vehicle for them, and the horse of the English gentleman was lame, and what to do they knew not, unless the high and excellent *damen* would come to the rescue, and let the gentlemen share their carriage, as they were also going to the Kniebis. It was often done when compatriots and tourists were in similar difficulties; and the ladies had seen the gentlemen and spoken to them.

The Countess cut short his voluble explanations. "Very well," she said, "it doesn't signify. They can have the back seats."

"Oh, Nina!" pleaded Corinna, looking annoyed.

"*Ma chère*," exclaimed her friend, "don't be prudish. They are gentlemen, that is sure enough, and you owe one of
them a debt of gratitude. That odious creature would have pounced on you like a hungry cat if it hadn't been for his timely warning. Besides, it will be amusing to have some one to talk to."

Still Corinna objected. But Madame Nina prayed and teased her into reluctant compliance.

"What did it matter after all?" she argued. "They were only compagnons de voyage. It did not necessitate an acquaintance or intimacy at any future time."

So Corinna yielded.

They waited until the noisy tourists had driven off, which they did after much shouting, and swearing, and discussion. Then their own carriage drove up, and the Countess saw the Kellner talking to
the gentlemen as they stood under the shade of the trees.

"Perhaps I had better go and explain," she said to Corinna, and went out with her manners quite en grande dame, as they could be when she chose, and was charmingly dignified and gracious, because she in no way desired the strangers to think there was anything of the aventurière about herself or her companion; but at the first glance she caught of the Englishman's companion, an exclamation of surprise broke from her.

"Count Fedoroff!" she exclaimed. "Is it possible? How charming!"

Explanations and greetings followed rapidly. Madame Nina rushed back to Corinna in great excitement.

"Fancy, ma chère, one of them is my
Russian, the hero of the cigars, the rival of Raoul de Chaumont. Isn't life odd? We seem to drift round and round in circles till we meet again."

"It is a pity the circle does not bring round the Monsieur de Chaumont," said Corinna, with a smile. "Still, I am glad these gentlemen are not both strangers——"

"You ought to like Fedoroff," rattled on the Countess. "He is charming, handsome, accomplished, of a great Russian family, and enormously rich. My dear, it is a perfect godsend."

"I had rather we went by ourselves," said Corinna, calmly.

In after years she thought of this speech, and thought, too, of the strange reluctance with which she set out on that memorable excursion. Was it some prescience of future trouble—some fore-seeing
of future sorrow that the years to come would bring?

It seemed so when, instead of looking forward, Fate had taught her to look back.

The long drive to the Alexanderschanze is a very pleasant one. The party took the Kniebis route, with its winding, shady road and beautiful views of the plain of the Rhine, and the dark heights of the Vosges mountains.

They were all in good spirits; even the Englishman had shaken off his reserve and talked well and eloquently. Corinna was the most silent of the four; but, then, the Countess made up for that by her volubility and gaiety.

Loris Federoff had been a great traveller, and they had in common many
subjects of discussion. Besides, they were both of that *monde* which the Countess alternately worshipped and deserted; and though it was her present caprice to rail at it, she questioned the Count pretty closely on the doings and sayings of her fashionable contemporaries. Then she made amends for her evident curiosity by railing at its objects.

"They are just like sheep, these women," she said, with a pretty contempt that made Corinna smile. "What one does, so do they all. If it were fashionable to be devout, no doubt they would turn nuns to-morrow and try to rival each other in the set of their black veils and the costliness of their rosaries."

"Out of naught can come but naught," said Gilbert Brandon, gravely. "To people
who have no minds for anything higher, loftier, more ennobling than the cut of a gown, the receipt of a card, the entrée of a particular house, each and all of those things seem very momentous, no doubt."

"There are women who, if the archangel's trump were sounding in the heavens, would find time to look at their neighbours' dresses," said Loris, contemptuously. "It has been my misfortune to know many. I wonder sometimes what they will find to do in a world that knows no Worth, or Zola."

"That is hard," laughed Madame Nina. "The soul may be there, after all, only it has fallen asleep."

"With too much chloral," he said, quickly. "Ah, pardon me, Madame, there
are only too many women in society of whom one asks, 'Is it possible they have souls at all?' They are like the sawdust dolls—very pretty—very faultlessly dressed, very chic, but—c'est tout."

"You are hard on them," said Corinna, quietly, a little flush coming into her delicate, proud face. "There is a proverb, you know, which says, 'Women are what men make them.'"

"Not the women of the day," he answered, quickly; "their idol is fashion—their god M. Worth. I defy any man to overthrow such rivals, and turn the sawdust into flesh and blood."

"You have been singularly unfortunate, Monsieur, if you have formed such opinions from experience," said Corinna. "My knowledge of my own sex is but limited, I confess, yet I have noticed it
"WHAT'S THE BEST THING?" 93

is the 'dolls,' as you call them, who seem to attract and keep the attention of yours."

"Of course," scoffed the Countess, "men always object to intellectual women. They want to maintain their superiority over us, and the best means to do that is to persuade us brains are useless and unfeminine. A clever woman is never such a social success as a pretty one. Men feel a little uncomfortable, perhaps even a little afraid of the one; they can be what they please with the other."

"I think it is you now, Madame, who are hard on us," smiled Fedoroff. "Do you think men are only able to hold their own against la femme galante?"

"I think they consider it more amusing, and therefore more alluring employment than in measuring wits with what
they often call *la femme impossible,* answered the Countess. "You are very good at fancying we are all cut on one pattern."

"If it were the pattern of Madame la Comtesse, who would blame us?"

She laughed merrily. "Not badly said, Count. But I don't credit flattery. I am past the age, and, to my thinking, the language of compliment is an insult to sense."

"May there not be a case when the compliment, as you call it, is but a simple utterance of a true feeling?"

"You must be a courtier, M. Fedoroff," laughed Madame Nina. "You turn phrases so prettily. It is so long, though, since I have heard pretty speeches; I fear I have lost sight of their value and importance. For two years I have given up the world, and
lived in the rarefied atmosphere of my friend Mdlle. D'Avisgnes' society."

"It will be only too excusable, then, if all other fails to charm you," he said, with a low bow.

"On the contrary," said Corinna, with a shade of displeasure at the personal turn of the conversation. "It must make her long to return to that 'other' which Monsieur has so ably recalled."
CHAPTER VI.

"I bear upon my forehead shed
The light of what I lose."

"Fairly hit," laughed Madame Nina. "But really my whim has lasted a long time. For two years we have travelled to all famous and non-famous places, boring each other as only two women can."

"Speak for yourself, Nina," murmured her friend, reproachfully.

"Ma chère, you must have been bored often, only you were too polite to confess it. When the fruits of this tour of ours
are seen in the new work you are writing, I fear there will also be seen the bad effects of such a travelling companion."

Corinna was silent. She felt somewhat annoyed. She disliked hearing herself or her works discussed, or being put forward in any way to attract notice. It was no affectation of humility, it was that same inherent shrinking from anything like publicity or parade, which made her tastes so simple and correct.

Gilbert Brandon, watching her closely, noted the constraint and annoyance, and, in the momentary silence that ensued, he plunged into a disquisition on the scenery through which they were passing. Fedoroff followed his lead with ready tact. He spoke too of Russia, and life there, and Corinna grew interested. She looked at him more observantly than she had yet
done, noting what an air of distinction and grace was in all he said and did. His face was singularly handsome and attractive, but she had not noted that until eloquence warmed it into animation.

"It is needless to say you are no patriot," said the Countess, suddenly. "Your words convey as much. And to have travelled so much, you can have spent but little time in Russia."

Corinna fancied that his face grew a shade paler. "You are right, Madame," he said; "like most Russians, I like my country best when I am out of it."

"Ah! those terrible societies," said the Countess, with a little shiver. "I remember when I was in Petersburg noting what an element of disorder reigned everywhere. No one seemed on terms of confidence with any one else. There seemed a
"I bear upon my forehead."

canker at the root of all friendship and affection."

"That is the case," answered Count Loris. "The system is to be deplored. To live there is at best a gilded slavery. One half the nation preys on the other half. As for the poor, ground down to the dust—fettered by laws—crushed by ignorance—brutalised by tyranny—it is a wonder that secret rebellion has not created one mighty revolution."

"You speak warmly," said Brandon, looking at him in surprise. "And, pardon me, but I thought all Russian nobles upheld their order. From your words——"

"Oh, Monsieur, no politics and no arguments, if you please," cried the little Countess. "I have been in Petersburg. I know; it is all horrible, dreadful, terrifying; but I want to hear no more of it."
Let us talk”—and she glanced round and gave a comprehensive wave of her hand—“of the scenery!”

When they reached the Alexander-schanze they alighted to give the horses a rest.

“The Gasthof is a great institution in this dear Deutschland,” said Madame Nina, as she dismounted. “No matter to what remote region you go, you are sure to find a restauraution, and after a drive through the clear, cool mountain air one can enjoy even the simple fare of Schweizer Käse and Schwartz Brod.”

“With or without the inevitable sausage,” smiled Brandon.

“And the still more inevitable Rheinwein,” added Corinna. “I have been amused often by hearing your countrymen
DEAR UPON MY FOREHEAD.

calling for bottled beer at some little primitive inn like this. When will the English learn that 'in Rome we must do as the Romans?' to quote a very hackneyed phrase. But, really, they make themselves much more uncomfortable than they need."

Madame Nina was talking to Loris Fedoroff. Corinna and Brandon sauntered on side by side. He was ordinarily a very composed and tranquil man. Nor did he, as a rule, lack conversational ability. Yet he was conscious of a restraint in this woman's presence that in some way chilled and embarrassed him. To him she had none of the elements of ordinary womanhood—womanhood such as he had known and associated with. She seemed to him a mystery, subtle and yet sweet, to which he vainly sought the key. She
furnished him with food for deep and strange thoughts, and yet held him awkward and embarrassed in her presence.

"Do you stay long in Germany?" he asked, with some hesitation, when they had discussed the view, as in duty bound.

"I scarcely know," she answered. "We are very erratic. Our movements depend on our own inclinations. At present we are 'doing' the Schwarzwald. But Nina may tire of its wildness and gloom. Then—it is impossible to say where we shall go."

"Have you no voice in the matter?" he asked, in surprise.

"I—well, no. You see, this is my first experience of travelling. I find every place delightful, and Nina knows much better where to go than I do. I
studied countries from books, and they gave me many false impressions."

"Have you ever been to England?"

"No," she said, "not yet."

"Do you mean to come?" he asked, eagerly. "Your friend seems to have prejudices on that point. But you must not judge too severely of my country. It has much beauty, and I think the people are warm-hearted and sincere despite their stiffness."

"I have no prejudices against them," she said, smiling at his partisanship. "The English I have met in Paris have been always most charming!"

"You see much society in Paris, doubtless."

"On the contrary, Monsieur, I see very little. My own home is in a quiet little country nook. The nearest village is two
leagues off, and neighbours I have none. But I prefer my poor little château and my solitary life to those months of gaiety into which I am unwillingly forced when I visit Paris."

"Your confession is very unusual for a woman, and—pardon me—a woman so celebrated as Mdlle. D'Avisgnes."

She made a slight gesture. Her eyes turned to the wild, dark forest range with something of impatience and regret.

"Fame is ephemeral at best," she said, "and what I have done scarcely merits it. Sometimes I think——"

She paused. Then her eyes left the dusky mountain range, and glanced upwards to where the sky stretched serene, and cloudless, and unfathomable.

"I think," she went on, gravely, "that I would like to do something great—one
work that should leave its stamp on the world for all the years to come—and then—die."

"What a strange idea!" he said, half shocked, half chilled by her look and voice. "Death and you have nothing in common. You should not encourage morbid sentiments—it is unhealthy. It destroys the freshness and vitality of the mind."

"I don't think I am morbid," she said, with that soft, serious smile that set his heart beating every time he saw it. "No one has ever accused me of that before. Perhaps my words sound exaggerated to one whose life is calmly and evenly balanced, as yours is without doubt."

"Yes," he said, simply, "your words just describe my life. It has been almost too evenly balanced; if, indeed, that can be counted as a fault."
"I think you are to be envied," said Corinna, looking at him as she spoke, and noting what a calm, tranquil face gave evidence of the truth of his words—a face where no stamp of suffering, no warring passions, had set their seal and scars. "A calm, prosaic life is no doubt the happiest. Few can boast of it, though. Still, to live, one needs more than that, I suppose: so my friend Nina is always telling me."

"To live means a great deal to you, I suppose," he said, "or so your books seem to say. Yet there is always a strain of sadness in them, strangely at variance with what you say of your life and yourself."

"It is a great mistake to judge of a writer by his works," said Corinna. "As our American friend said, 'Authors are
most disappointing.’ To my own mind it seems a mistake for artists of any kind ever to reveal their identity. Like Eros, they should be adored unseen. The light once thrown on them, the charm is gone.”

“But the world at large would suffer by so severe a rule,” he answered. “And the secret could never be wholly kept, for even the artist soul is human to some extent. It needs sympathy, friendship, love. Do you not think so?”

“I have thought so sometimes,” she said, hesitatingly, “although few lives could have been more lonely than my own. Yet I have been very happy.”

“As the world counts happiness?”

“Scarcely that, I suppose. There is so little to show. Only one feels.”

“But to feel deeply is to lay claim to human weakness and human suffering.”
"The latter has not reached me yet, save through the shadow of others' woes," she said, with that soft gravity that seemed to have more of the saint than the woman in it. "I do not expect to be exempt always. As for weakness, I have plenty of that, Monsieur. Witness my dread of being interviewed, even with the glorification of the New York Forum in prospect."

"I feel grateful to that woman, notwithstanding," said Brandon, smiling at the recollection of the morning's adventure. "I owe to her the honour and pleasure of a day passed in your society. Think how many would envy me that."

"That speech, Monsieur, is like one of the Count Fedoroff's. It is not at all English, and, in real truth, I know no one who would envy you, unless they shared
our American friend's passion for inter-viewing disappointments.

"Did I hear my name?" inquired the voice of the Count at this juncture. He and Madame Nina had approached within hearing distance of the two, who had forgotten the waiting carriage, or the grass-grown Alexanderschanze, or even the wonderful prospect from the summit of the Kniebis.

"I am afraid I must plead guilty to using it," said Corinna. "I was telling Monsieur Brandon you had imbued him with your ability for saying pretty things."

"You looked so serious, I fancied you were discovering the height of the Kniebis, or whether that river is the Rench, or the Grindenbach," said Madame Nina, who always liked to hear her own voice if possible.
"Corinna, shall we have some lunch, or wait till we get to——"

"It is early yet," said Corinna, glancing at their two companions.

"Yes," agreed Brandon. "Besides, according to Baedeker, we shall find a better inn further on—the 'Zum Lamm.'"

"The name is attractive and pastoral," laughed Fedoroff. "By all means, let us go there."

They entered the carriage again, and a mile further on halted at the inn with the pastoral name, and had luncheon brought to them under the trees.

It was very pleasant—very idyllic—very simple. Yet the four people thrown so strangely together, two of whom were votaries of the world, and two of grave and tranquil lives, found a strange and subtle pleasure underlying the simplicity.
The Countess chirped and chattered in her witty, vivacious fashion. Corinna listened and smiled, and now and then dropped some fanciful and trenchant observation.

But when she spoke the two men always listened, and one of them watched her with that interested, studious regard which in itself is homage. Corinna caught the glance ever and anon, and it seemed to disturb her usual serenity. She had never seen any man’s eyes look at her as did those black-lashed, azure eyes of Loris Fedoroff. They seemed to compel her own regard, whether she would or no, and to give a new and subtle meaning to those graceful courtesies which were as natural to him as the air he breathed.

"He is certainly very striking looking,
and, as Nina said, has charming manners,“ ran her thoughts as that *al fresco* repast came to an end.

It was the first time she had ever troubled herself to consider whether a man was charming or not.
CHAPTER VII.

"Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?"

It was very pleasant returning home in the cool, late afternoon through the forest paths and dusky glades, which make the Kniebis route so beautiful.

The sunlight gleamed through the bronze-hued leaves, and lit up the face of Corinna as she lay back on her cushions, her eyes following the glancing line of the river as it ran through the valley below.

"One can understand Wagner writing such music," she said suddenly, "when he has
scenes like these from which to draw inspiration."

"Are you an admirer of the great prophet of the future?" inquired Brandon. "I confess I could see nothing to admire in his music when I heard it. It is all bang, bang—growl, growl; and when occasionally a tiny spark of melody is evoked, it is immediately covered up and swallowed in the darkness and blackness of turmoil."

"It's hideous rubbish, I think," said Madame Nina. "Puts me into a temper when I go to one of his operas. So long, so dreary, so utterly unmelodious. I always come away with an infinite compassion for the singers."

"You come from a land of melody, you see, Nina," said her friend. "Wagner's music does not appeal at once, perhaps,
to ears accustomed to the light tunefulness of the Italian school. But he is magnificent in his effects, and, when he does introduce a melody, he is exquisite. Witness the Bridal Music in 'Lohengrin,' the Pilgrim's Chorus and March in 'Tannhäuser,' the 'Preislied' in the 'Meistersinger,' the Spinning Chorus in the 'Fliegende Holländer,' or, later on, the exquisite bits in the 'Nibelung's Ring.' The melody throughout that fire music is one of the loveliest and most haunting I ever heard, and, as a piece of musical description it is unsurpassed."

"Maybe," said the Countess lazily. "Mais pour moi, I prefer Verdi or Gounod."

"Poor prophet, if he only heard you," smiled Fedoroff.

"Ah!" said the Countess quickly,
"talking of music reminds me—was it you, Monsieur, who sang that prayer from 'Masaniello' coming down the mountain-path last night?"

"I must plead guilty to the fact. I did not think I had an audience so near."

"You sing like an artist," she said. "I thought some great primo tenore from the Italian Opera was coming to enliven our solitude."

"You flatter me, Madame."

"I do not mean it as flattery. I never knew you sang, or could sing like that, my friend, and I was enchanted."

"That is quite true," said Corinna, looking at him. "I have heard a good deal of music—and good music. I never heard a voice like yours."

He bowed and looked almost embarrassed. "If it gave you a moment's
pleasure I am more than repaid," he murmured.

Brandon heard him, and moved impatiently. All this conversation did not please him. He understood little about music and cared less. He could not see why they should all make such a fuss because a man sang like one of those dressed-up, grimacing idiots of Italian Opera.

Corinna noticed the expression of his face, and smiled back at him as he sat opposite herself. A warm glow seemed to suffuse his whole nature, mentally and physically, as he caught that sign of comprehension.

"We gave you the credit of that mountain lay, did we not, Monsieur?" she said softly. "But is it really true that you do not—care—for music?"
"I fear I must plead guilty even at the risk of shocking you," he answered. "It made no part of my education; it never—so to speak—interested me, or roused me. I am ignorant of it practically and theoretically, and I own I would sooner go to one good play, than ten operas."

"How strange!" murmured Corinna. "To me music is like breathing another life—a life of subtle wonder and ecstatic joy, that thrills me almost to pain. You cannot understand any one feeling a sound like that, I suppose?"

"I fear I cannot. I am a very material person, Mademoiselle D'Avisgnes."

"You are as phlegmatic as a German and infinitely more material," interposed Madame Nina, horrified at such confessions.
"Why, what does your national poet say? 'The man who hath not music in his soul, let no such man be trusted!' You have destroyed all my good impressions of you, Monsieur Brandon."

"I am deeply grieved to be so unfortunate," he said, smiling at the pretty, petulant face; "but allow at least that I did not sail under false pretences. I was very candid."

"To be candid is always to be disagreeable, I find," pouted Madame Nina. "Whenever a person is going to give you horrid advice, or accuse you of doing anything dreadful, or borrow money, or, in fact, do anything unpleasant, he always says he is going to be candid."

"Better to be disagreeable than untruthful," said Corinna gravely.
Loris Fedoroff looked at her; she thought his face was a little pale and his eyes held an unusual gravity.

"Do you think so, really?" he said, addressing her, and bending slightly forward. "It would make life very unpleasant, though."

"Perhaps people would talk less," said Corinna. "But would that matter very much? Half the things we say are meaningless, and the other half false."

"Are you of opinion that words were only given to conceal thoughts?" he asked in the same low key that kept the conversation from becoming general.

"Far from it. They should clothe thought in harmonious and graceful garb; yet have they not degraded it into untruthfulness?"
“Society compels us to be untruthful,” he said, as if in apology for differing from her views.

“It would never compel me,” she said fearlessly.

“Because you care nothing for it; you can afford to ignore it. Believe me, there are few so fortunate. If you were dependent on it—if it became an obligation to cultivate it, you would not be able to say frankly all you think and feel, without the risk of becoming unpopular, and, perhaps—disliked.”

“Still,” she said, “I cannot see why the voice of the world is so all-important. I think if people were more candid, more fearless, more independent, they would be far happier. Why should we put conscience, opinions, feelings, into the keeping of a false morality, knowing it to be false?”
"Why?" he retorted, and a swift ironic light came into his eyes. "Because we are afraid; because we follow precedent; because to walk in the ground marked out, is so much pleasanter and easier than to strike an independent track for ourselves; because we need not fear the slings and stones of the world if we do as the world does; because — Ah, Mademoiselle, there are a hundred reasons, yet not one that would look worthy in your eyes. You would never see anything but folly in the wisdom that says, 'Suit yourself to your age—your time.' Yet it is the true art of success. Society is always intolerant of alteration or benefit—such as you would bestow."

She looked pained and troubled. The cynical voice, the heartless words, the ironic look, were all displeasing to her.
He noted the shadows on her face; instinctively his voice took a softer and more caressing tone under cover of a fire of words from Madame Nina's brilliant tongue.

"You are still living on Olympus, chère Mademoiselle. You cannot see anything to be lost or gained by admission to that mystic region of 'Society.' You poets have an enviable facility, you can always escape to cloudland when the world grows wearisome; but for less favoured mortals, they cannot forget humanity owns a card-basket."

"A narrow limit to set to ambition."

"Pardon me—a very wide one in the sense of the world. It stretches to palaces and thrones. It affects the whole social system. It has produced anarchy and revolution. It has laid the foundation
of many a majestic enterprise. It has coined the magic of gold, and been the watchword of success. It thinks its ends very noble and very satisfying, and looks upon unworldliness as a folly that is little short of insanity."

"What a brilliant tirade!" struck in Madame Nina, who had paused in her own conversation—a discussion on Descartes—to listen to Fedoroff, "but wasted on Mademoiselle D’Avisgnes, Count. She has not a spark of worldly wisdom about her. As for the card-basket, she would rather tie up her door-knocker and dream in solitude, than be disturbed by a visit from the greatest personage in Europe."

"No, I am not quite such a hermit," interposed Corinna. "It is only that I don’t care for the intrusion of curiosity,
and even great people can be very vulgar, if you will pardon the heresy. I object to being stared at and questioned, and I am not formed by nature to be a brilliant light in society like Madame la Comtesse, only she will never believe it."

"She said one day she would rather listen than talk," interposed little Madame Nina. "Fancy, a woman saying that!"

"Certainly an anomaly," smiled Brandon, "but a very pleasing one, for—men. We all adore the nymph Egeria."

"An ungrateful speech, Monsieur," said Madame Nina, "considering how I have been trying to entertain you. But, perhaps, you would rather be listened to."

"Ah, no! You wrong me, Madame. But, then, for one of your sex who can
talk, and talk charmingly, how many are there who cannot?"

"I will take the implied compliment," laughed Madame Nina. "But when you want a listener you must go to Made- moiselle D'Avisgnes."

Brandon thought he would be only too happy to do that, but he knew also that if Corinna made a good listener he made anything but a brilliant talker in her presence. He felt a sense of constraint, of embarrassment; it was unusual, and he could not account for it, neither could he shake it off.

Corinna was very silent during the rest of the drive. They tried in vain to draw her into the light worldly conversation that Madame Nina loved, and Fedoroff could so well follow and keep up.

When they reached Allerheiligen she
only bowed to the two gentlemen and went straight up to her room. Madame Nina lingered behind a moment.

"As we all part to-morrow," she said, "will you both come up to my rooms after dinner? Let us end the day with some music; if you, Count, will second my poor endeavours, we will try and convert Monsieur Brandon."

They both answered they would be charmed, delighted, and then sauntered off to order their own dinner, and smoke a cigar or two under the linden trees.

Madame Nina went up to Corinna's room. "May one enter?" she called out merrily.

"Yes," answered her friend somewhat coldly. She was feeling tired, troubled, anything but inclined for the frothy chatter of the little Countess.
“Well, is he not charming?” asked Madame Nina, going up to the glass to see that her hat was straight, and her hair not too dishevelled, by reason of the long stay in the open air.

“Who?” inquired Corinna.

She had thrown off her hat and was pushing the soft, loose hair off from her brow in somewhat absent fashion.

“Who!” cried Madame Nina, whirling round. “Can you ask that? English people are seldom—charming! My Russian nightingale, of course. Oh, how pleased I am to meet him again! It is like a breath of the—”

“Boulevards,” suggested Corinna quickly as she paused.

Madame Nina laughed. “I did not mean that, but it will do. I mean the old life. I have lived for two years
without hearing a scandal, or relating one. Marvellous!"

"You made up for it to-day, though," said Corinna. "Monsieur Fedoroff told you plenty."

"I think you are more interested in the Englishman," said Madame Nina, looking at her gravely. "Ah, well, he is more like yourself; though, as the salt of life is contrast, you ought to fall in love with some one very frivolous, very impulsive, very ordinary."

"Fall in love!" echoed Corinna with faint contempt. "I don't think I shall ever do that."

"You are too self-engrossed—too wise, you think," said Madame Nina, ruffling her dusky curls and thinking to herself that she was a pretty woman still, despite her thirty years.
"Still, ma chère, the wisest of us commit that folly at some period or other. But to return to Fedoroff. Is he not good-looking, and has he not the manners of a courtier?"

"He has very good manners certainly," said Corinna as she began to remove her travelling-dress, "and seems intelligent."

"Intelligent!" almost screamed the Countess. "Ma chère, what are you saying? He is one of the cleverest of men. He has all the talents. He can sing like an angel; he plays like Liszt; he paints magnificently; talks brilliantly; waltzes superbly, and has perfect manners. Intelligent! Why, you would say that of a dancing dog, or a monkey who performed tricks. No doubt, though, you would appreciate the dog or monkey infinitely
more, simply because they were not—men."

"No doubt," echoed Corinna, half smiling at her friend's indignation. "But then the dog or the monkey would be faithful, honest, devoted. They are virtues few men possess."

"How do you know? You have seen so few. You go into society so little."

"Quite enough to appraise its worth, or the worth of any sentiment it professes."

"Well," said Madame Nina, somewhat sulkily, "I think Loris adorable. I have asked him to come and sing to us tonight after dinner."

Corinna started slightly. "And is he coming?"

"Of course." And Madame Nina glanced at herself in the mirror, and
smiled coquettishly. "He would do anything I asked him."

Corinna looked at her gravely and steadily for a second or two. "I see," she said quietly.
CHAPTER VIII.

But if alone we be
Where is our Empery?

MADAME NINA took especial pains with her toilette that night. It was true she had brought only two dresses with her to this out-of-the-world nook in the heart of the Schwarzwald, but one of these, by some clever manipulation of knots of ribbon, and judicious touches of lace, and a bunch of wild flowers at her throat, made a charming evening dress.

As for Corinna, she usually wore a soft cream-coloured gown in the even-
ings, made like Marguerite's in *Faust*, with a pouch of black velvet at her girdle, and black velvet at the throat and sleeves. The rich, dusky masses of her hair were lifted from the smooth, low brow, and wound closely round her head. She looked like a beautiful picture as she sat by the window in the fading evening light. So at least Loris Fedoroff thought as he entered the room. Madame Nina looked like a fashion plate—a very pretty one, certainly—but still a fashion plate, in contrast with that stately, graceful figure of her friend.

The Countess had a little scheme in her head. Brandon would pair off with Corinna. She thought they suited each other very well. She would have her charming Russian to herself. Not that she cared for gossip or Parisian scandal,
or the latest fashionable argot, or to hear who was the new empress of the demi-monde. No; she had wearied of all these things and gone in for intellect and art, and could talk of Giorgio, or Orizia Fontana, and Faenza, and was enthusiastic on pottery and triptychs, and the old masters, and adored art wildly, even if she held somewhat confused notions respecting its votaries past and present. Still, after two years——

But the scheme did not succeed, for Fedoroff went over to Corinna and sat by her side, and Gilbert Brandon talked to Madame Nina, and talked so cleverly that she found her superficial knowledge a very poor preparation for such an opponent. In despair, she had coffee brought in, and then suggested music.

At the suggestion, Corinna's eyes went
straight to that handsome, fair face of Loris Fedoroff's. He read her glance and smiled, and went over to the piano unhesitatingly.

First he played some dreamy, quaint melodies of Schumann, then one or two of Mendelssohn's "Lieder ohne Wörte," the saddest and most pathetic in the whole collection.

Then he sang one or two of the German Volkslieder in that rich, passionate tenor which might have made him famous as Mario, had he so desired. He concluded with the Preghiero from "Masaniello."

Corinna sat by the window, her eyes on the dusky woods, her hands clasped on her lap; her whole senses entranced and spellbound by those exquisite melodies.
Brandon watched her rapt face, and was conscious of a growing feeling of anger and annoyance with his brilliant fellow-traveller, whose eyes rested always on that slender white figure. It seemed as if for her and her alone he brought forth his wonderful gifts in such rich and varied display.

"I suppose he is the sort of fellow a woman would think about," Brandon muttered to himself.

He was right. Very few women looked at that clear-cut face, with its dreamy eyes, and broad brow, and beautiful mouth, without feeling interested in it. It was a face that suggested romance and sorrow. A face that had haunted many a woman's memory—to her cost.

Madame Nina read him differently to
Corinna. Brandon, looking at him, saw no charm in the face, handsome as he allowed it to be.

"I should say he was selfish, inconstant, untrustworthy," he said in his own mind, and all the time that flood of beautiful melody floated out to the still night, and the voice of the singer took a more pathetic tone, and the woman's eyes grew dim with tears, and Corinna said to herself: "He must have suffered, to sing like that."

When he stopped at last and left the instrument, she could find no words to thank him. Empty phrases of courtesy seemed to her unsuited to express the feelings his music had aroused.

But the eloquent gesture with which she extended her hand as he came to
her side, the look in those great violet eyes as she raised them to his own, were sweeter thanks than any words.

After all, it is more to the artist's soul to be understood than to be praised, and he felt that this past hour had brought him nearer to Corinna than months of ordinary intercourse would have done. Yet why should he wish her to understand him—think of him? As he asked himself that question, he felt the blood rise to his face. He knew it was an unworthy desire that he should arouse within this pure girlish soul even that vague speculative interest which so easily is fanned into a warmer feeling. True, he might never so fan it; might not even desire anything further. Still, to trouble the deep waters of a nature like this for
mere idle vanity, seemed both selfish and unworthy. He had never troubled himself before as to the cost of the passions he aroused. Women had been so easily won that he had grown used to thinking they might be as lightly lost.

But now——

His speculations broke off. He roused himself with an effort. He left the side of this woman for whom he felt a strange and subtle attraction, mingled with an unwonted reverence. He turned to Madame Nina, and resumed that light and frivolous gossip which her soul loved, and Corinna, leaning back amidst the gathering shadows, listened, and felt annoyed and perplexed at the sudden change.

It seemed so out of harmony with the artist element that had appealed instinc-
tively to her heart, and made her think for one hour of this man, as all her life she had never thought of another.

The god had become mortal, the fire had grown dim and burnt down to ashes. She felt wearied and impatient, and all her usual sweet serenity deserted her. When Brandon talked she answered him coldly and absently. She would have preferred to be silent, yet felt in duty bound to exert herself for her friend's sake, and so talked of Roman antiquities and German *Bäder*, and French politics, as likely subjects to entertain this calm and well-informed Englishman.

And he—as long as she talked to him—cared little what she talked. He did not want her to think of this fair-haired Romeo with the amorous eyes, and soft
voice. He felt an instinctive distrust of him, even when, on discussing nationality, Fedoroff laid claim to English descent by his mother's side, and told them how most of his early years had been spent in her country.

Corinna had broken off her conversation with himself then, and looked up. "My mother was also English," she said, and to Brandon it seemed as if that sentence made no appeal to his interest, though naturally it ought to have done so, but rather claimed a bond of unity with the Russian Count, whose graceful acknowledgments proclaimed how quickly he too had detected the fact.

"And you really go to-morrow?" said Madame Nina regretfully, as the two men rose at last to take their leave.
"I fear I must," Brandon answered. "My time is limited, and I am anxious to see Switzerland before I return to England."

"But you, Count," she said eagerly, "you are not tied to time, are you? You can afford to explore the beauties of the Schwarzwald in more leisurely fashion."

He hesitated for a second’s space. Involuntarily his eyes went to Corinna, but she was not looking at him now.

"Yes," he said, "my time is my own, and if I can be of any service to Madame——"

The Countess smiled radiantly. "Of course you can—a hundred services. Then it is only 'au revoir.'"

He bowed. He was wondering whether
that momentary glance in Corinna's eyes had been pleasure or—surprise.

"These foreigners carry everything before them," thought Brandon savagely.
"What a fool I was not to say I would remain also! After all Switzerland does not matter."

Aloud he said, "I, too, shall only say *au revoir*, Madame, for something seems to tell me we shall meet again. Meanwhile, believe me, I shall ever feel myself your debtor for a most charming day."

"Really, for an Englishman, he was not so bad," said Madame Nina an hour afterwards, as she and Corinna sat in their dressing-robies and sipped chocolate. "I wonder if we ever shall meet him again."

Ah! if she had but known when and
how, would she have laughed so lightly over the day's adventures, unseeing in every trivial circumstance a link in that terrible chain which Fate was already forging for their lives?
CHAPTER IX.

To dream of sweetness
Is sweet as to know.

The succeeding morning Corinna did not rise as early as her wont. She had slept but little, and felt feverish and fatigued.

It was nearly eight o'clock when she left the inn and strolled out into the grounds. Some one who had been watching for that graceful figure in its soft gray dress, followed.

The birth of love is a silent, unconscious magnetism that serves to draw two un-
familiar lives to one another. It is inexplicable—it is irresistible—but it is as sure as if those slender threads of attraction were rivets of steel.

Loris Fedoroff was not a man to deny himself any fancy that held aught of charm or interest, and the impulse of the moment was certainly to avail himself of any privilege of _compagnon de voyage_ that might fall in his way. Of other considerations he did not think—possibilities were things he rarely troubled himself about. Yet as he watched her moving along by the lake, he paused. Why should he disturb her—why should he for his own gratification seek to trouble that dreaming, beautiful, serious nature of hers, that seemed to hold in it so much of rest and repose after the glare, and fume, and fret of the world as he knew it?
"Perhaps I had better not accompany her," he thought, and slackened his pace.

Sounds of voices and laughter reached him. He looked back, and saw the tourists at breakfast. Eager to get away from their unwelcome proximity, he hurried through the trees.

At that moment came the rush of eager feet, the noise of panting breath, and a large hound broke through the brushwood and sprang on him with eager manifestations of delight.

"Sapristi!" cried Fedoroff in involuntary amazement. "It is Donau! How in the world did he find his way here?"

The noise of the dog's barks and excited cries had arrested Corinna's steps. She paused and looked back; then as the Count raised his hat she retraced her way, and approached.
"Is he yours?" she said eagerly. "Ah, one can see that without asking. What a beautiful creature! But how dusty and tired he looks!"

"Down, Donau, down!" cried Loris fiercely; and the great hound crouched like a lamb at his feet. "He has followed me from Gernsbach," he said to Corinna. "I left him there with my Russian servant. No wonder he is tired."

"All those miles!" exclaimed Corinna. "Oh, the poor animal! But why did you leave him behind?"

"He is rather a troublesome companion, you see," said Fedoroff. "He thinks nothing of making a raid on a larder or a fowl-yard, and has a supreme disregard for game-laws. But now he has chosen to come—why, he must re-
main. I wonder Kirski let him free. I gave him such strict orders."

"See, he has broken his chain," said Corinna, stooping over the panting hound and pointing to a fragment still attached to his collar. "What a splendid animal he is, and how he must love you!"

"I believe he does," said Fedoroff, looking down at the beautiful, honest eyes of the hound. "He is one of the few friends in whose fidelity I feel I can trust. Dogs never cheat us, Mademoiselle D'Avisgnes. They are ignorant of men's acts of oblivion and neglect, and they never forget kindness, or repay it with ingratitude."

"True," she said, stroking Donau's beautiful, glossy head with one white, ungloved hand. "I have several dogs
at my home in France. One special favourite. He is a St. Bernard. He was sent to me when quite young, by an old painter, who is a friend of mine. He procured him while on a sketching tour in the Alps. I wished so much to bring him with me; but Nina would not hear of it. She said he was too large; he would be a great trouble. They write me from home that he misses me terribly. If we winter at Rome, as Nina wishes, I shall send for him."

"Do you think of wintering at Rome?" he asked eagerly.

"My friend talks of it," she answered, looking surprised at his tone. "And I should like it, I think. Rome tells one so much."

"Unless you look upon it as most of its visitors do," said Fedoroff. "A mix-"
ture of London, and Paris, and foreign spas. A place for idlers of all *mondes*, to whom the Pincio is only represented by fretting horses and emblazoned carriages, and fashionable dandies and long-haired artists. There are plenty of people to whom the name of Rome conveys no other meaning but that."

"I am not one of them," she said, smiling.

"I think you need hardly tell me that," he answered, rather low, and looking at her with the tender, dreamy gaze that so perplexed and troubled her.

"Will you not see that your dog has some food?" she said, avoiding his eyes. "And he must be thirsty too."

He did not want to leave her, but
the animal was in sore need of rest and refreshment. He attempted a sort of compromise. "If I attend to Donau," he said, "I shall lose your society, unless you will be compassionate enough to wait."

"I am only going to the ruins," she said quietly. "I always like a walk before breakfast, though Nina calls it a most unfeminine habit."

"Then I shall hope to see you again," and he raised his hat and left her, the dog following.

But whether by accident or design, or because Corinna was familiar with all the paths and nooks in the vicinity, and Loris was not, they did not meet again; and after breakfast Corinna declared she was going to write, and Madame Nina only came out, and he felt in duty bound
to escort her wherever her vagrant fancy led, and thought to himself that he had never known before what a bore a pretty, fashionable, and fairly clever woman could be, which certainly was not complimentary to little Madame Nina, who considered she had been a most entertaining and delightful companion.

That he could have left her with that impression strong on her mind, was creditable to his patience and politeness. She fluttered into the room where Corinna was bending studiously over piles of MSS., and went off into such ecstasies on the subject of "ce charmant Loris" that her friend grew rather wearied.

"Did you find him as charming when you knew him years ago?" she asked, somewhat petulantly.

She had been writing a poem, and
Madame Nina's chatter did not chime in well with—

Strange thoughts that suit the dark and sombre woods,
And gather shapes as hands may gather flowers,
And strangely set to music of strange moods...

Enter Madame Nina.

"I scarcely know," answered the Countess, pausing to consider that question. "Very likely not. You see, carissima, there were so many others—then."

Corinna could not forbear a smile. "Poor Count!" she said, and gathered up the scattered sheets and rose from the table. "Well, he has the field to himself now, at all events."

"What would you have, dear?" asked Madame Nina, glancing at the faultless fit of her tailor-made travelling gown, and feeling a glow of satisfaction at its perfection. "One must amuse
oneself, you know, and I always think men are to women what toys are to children."

"Flattering—to the men," said Corinna.

"It is only to serve them as they would serve us," went on Madame Nina.

"I am always telling you it is bad to take things seriously. Friendship between a man and a woman would become quite a delightful science if only carefully and properly studied. It is absurd to think there is only one feeling possible between them—and so inconvenient."

"Dearest Nina," laughed Corinna, "your philosophies always amuse me because you yourself are the last person to believe in them, or act up to them. Still, if you are going to cultivate one of your 'friendships' for Count Fedoroff I may have an opportunity of seeing how the
system answers, for once. You have talked about it often enough. Meanwhile,” she added gravely, “don’t you think it is time we moved our quarters? We have been more than a week here already, and I think we have done most places of note.”

“Well, we will go back to Baden,” said Madame Nina, with alacrity.

“And what about the Wiesenthal?” asked Corinna. “You know we were to go there.”

“Ah!” said Madame Nina thoughtfully, “so we were. But do you really care to go to all those tiresome little places en route? The Schwarzwald is always the Schwarzwald. You won’t find anything better in the way of scenery than this.”

“We have not reached the highest
point yet," said Corinna calmly. "No doubt," she added, "Monsieur Fedoroff will accompany you if that is necessary to your enjoyment of mountain scenery. But I did hope we should get to the Höllen Pass, and to Feldberg."

"Oh, we can go if you wish," said Madame Nina briskly. "But it is all terribly wild and uncivilised."

"Ah, ma chère," smiled Corinna; "it is easy to see you are sighing for your Boulevards. Well, you must not martyrise yourself any more for my sake. Let us see Feldberg, and then—if you like—we will return to Paris."

"To Paris—now!" exclaimed Madame Nina, horrified. "My dear, it would be a desert, a prairie. No, we will spend September at Baden, October at home, and go to Rome in November. What say you?"
"The plan suits me very well," answered Corinna. "Only I must make one stipulation. In Rome you will know many people. You will visit and go into society, as you do in Paris. I must be left unfettered. I shall be writing all the winter, and I do not care to be disturbed."

"My dearest one," answered Madame Nina with effusion, "you will of course do just as you please. Our compact lasts but for two years, you know."

"Yes; and you have borne very creditably with my dulness and seriousness," said Corinna affectionately. "I feel as grateful to you for that, as for your suggestion about travelling."

"Fancy a star of such magnitude accusing herself of 'dulness,'" laughed Madame Nina. "My dear, I am the
most envied of women—be sure of that. Two years with the famous, the exclusive, the diffident Corinna! Why, it is hostage to a fame only second to your own.”

“And we will go to Feldberg?” asked Corinna, moving to the door.

“Most certainly. And to Rome?”

“Agreed—with my condition intact.”

“Of course, ma chère. Has not the oracle spoken?”

She went away then, carrying her papers with her. She felt disturbed, and a vague sense of annoyance stole over her.

“He has quite upset Nina,” she said impatiently. “And now I suppose our solitude will be disturbed and our plans disarranged, just for his sake. It is so stupid—and when one is a free agent——”
She broke off abruptly. "Père Joseph said we were never that," she mused presently, as she tossed the papers aside. "I wonder if he was right?"
CHAPTER X.

"Whose words had power by their own power to draw thee . . ."

Swinburne.

The winter season in Rome had commenced. Clear, crisp, sparkling weather, with skies of rose-leaf warmth, and tender violet hues that looked purple against the broken line of hills.

Society had assembled as usual in the same cliques and sections that had bored each other in London, in Paris, at Trouville, on the Riviera—everywhere, in fact, where fashion decreed they should meet
as it turned the wheel of the seasons. The Pincio was crowded now as the Row and the Bois, the planks, and the Casino had been in their turn. Crowded with chattering women, and fashionable beauties, and tired invalids, and idlers, and celebrities—a heterogeneous assemblage, and one that seemed unsuited to the grandeur of the scene, and the purple splendours of the sunset as its light fell on that maze of spires and roofs, and cupolas and towers, and ruins and palaces, that are centred round the great dusky dome of St. Peter's.

"News," murmured a languid-looking man who was standing beside a carriage, in which sat three ladies, "is there any news nowadays? Stay—yes. I have heard something, and as it is only ten minutes old, perhaps it can lay claim to
novelty. Who do you think is in Rome? Corinna!"

"Corinna!" murmured the lady vaguely. "Ah, a new singer, a danseuse, or what?"

"Don't you know?" exclaimed the Englishman. "She is the celebrated French authoress. Every one is talking about her last book. It is only just out. You must read it. It is called 'La Comtesse Hélène.'"

"I never read," murmured the lady. "I haven't time. If a book makes any stir one hears all about it. That is quite as satisfactory, and saves so much trouble. And is that all your news, Sir Wilfred? What is she like?—a dreadful creature, I suppose?—blue spectacles—dishevelled hair—perhaps she wears trousers. All clever women do that now, I hear. I always think myself that genius is very
undesirable—in a woman. Of course,” she added thoughtfully, “if they have no personal attractions, it is different.”

“My dear Lady Powderpuff,” laughed Sir Wilfred, “do you suppose a woman ever yet acknowledged, even to herself and her looking-glass, that she had no personal attractions?”

“And mamma talks as if one had first to decide that question before giving play to one’s intellectual capacity!” interposed the eldest daughter, who was somewhat of a blue-stockling, and liked to be considered “intellectual,” and intended to marry a clergyman when she found one nearly enough related to a bishop.

“Well,” said Lady Powderpuff, settling her furs more comfortably, “your ‘Corinna’ does not interest me. If it was Victor Hugo, now, or Tourguenieff, or Sardou
even; but a woman writer—and, of course, a nobody—"

"She is of good family," said Sir Wilfred Carew, who had learnt all about her at the club, "and, they say, beautiful."

"Is she here?" asked the intellectual one of the Ladies Powderpuff, glancing round at the string of carriages as if she expected to see one labelled like an advertised pill-box.

"I believe not," answered Sir Wilfred, who was an English baronet of aesthetic tastes, and had come to Rome to "pick up curios," so he said. "She lives a very retired life and objects to society. They say she has only come to Rome to write a book, on—us."

"How very impertinent!" exclaimed Lady Powderpuff. "Then the best thing we can do is to avoid her."
“Well,” laughed the young baronet, “you see if you do that, she will write what she imagines you; if you don’t, she will write of you as you are. Which would be preferable?”

“I think such people should not be admitted into society,” said Lady Powderpuff, who herself was the widow of a very new peer. “We are not exclusive enough. We ought to draw the line at artists and writers.”

“But even people in society write books,” smiled Sir Wilfred.

“Dear mother, you forget,” said the youngest daughter, who was called always “the fair Geraldine.” “You know Sir Wilfred himself published those lovely poems on ‘The Undesirability of Desires.’”

“Ah, true!” murmured Lady Powderpuff apologetically. “But then you see,
my dear, that is different. Sir Wilfred is not a regular author."

What Sir Wilfred might have said to such a crushing remark it would be unwise to conjecture. Fortunately at the same moment a carriage swept by, and he glanced at its occupants.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "there she is!"

"Who? what?" cried Lady Powderpuff, turning her head quickly.

"Corinna!" he exclaimed.

"Ah!" murmured the peeress, settling her gold eyeglass. "Really a very creditable-looking person. But I think you said she was of good family. Who is she with?"

"An Italian, Countess Floralia. They are great friends."

"Oh, I know the Countess," said Lady
"WHOSE WORDS HAD POWER." 169

Powderpuff. "Such a charming creature. But eccentric. Still she goes everywhere—or did. What has become of her for these two years?"

"She has been travelling with Corinna."

"What—alone? dear me, how improper! What things these 'geniuses' do!" murmured Lady Powderpuff vaguely.

"I believe they travelled in male attire," said the baronet, thinking he might as well romance a little.

"Really!" cried Lady Powderpuff eagerly, and scenting a scandal as a hound scents game.

"Oh, yes; and used to drink beer in the village Wirthshaus."

"Ah!" said the peeress, shaking her head; "no doubt there would be something about her. There always is, you
know, when a woman puts herself forward as a celebrity. She is not—*ahem*—not married!"

"Oh, no!"

"Ah!" she said again, as if that added to the enormity of her offences as a genius. "And do people receive her? Where does she stay?"

"People would receive her only too willingly; but she won't go to them."

"My dear Sir Wilfred," murmured the peeress pathetically, "do you really believe that?"

"And she lives," he resumed, "by herself."

"By herself? That is very singular," echoed Lady Powderpuff, dropping her voice and looking askance at her three daughters, who were all engrossed in discovering mutual acquaintances, but
nevertheless kept their virgin ears open for any tit-bits of scandal that their mother might be collecting.

"Why does she not live with the Countess Floralia?"

"Perhaps she is a lover of solitude," explained the baronet.

"Solitude!" Lady Powderpuff's bonnet actually shook with matronly indignation. "Depend upon it, my dear Sir Wilfred, when an unmarried woman wants to live alone there is something queer about her. Solitude! Stuff and nonsense! It is most improper. I do hope no one I know receives her."

"I expect they do," said Sir Wilfred mischievously. "You see, she is very celebrated, and her book just now is quite the thing to read and talk about. It is very clever—wonderfully so. Then, you
see, she is a very beautiful woman as well as a very gifted one.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Lady Powderpuff with contempt. "I could see nothing beautiful about her. She had very good sables."

Sir Wilfred laughed outright.

"Lady Powderpuff, your criticism is perfection, and truly feminine. Yes, perhaps it was only—the sables."

He made his adieus then, and sauntered off. That carriage, where the dark velvet and Russian sables framed in the pale, serious beauty of Corinna, was an object of universal criticism. A hundred stories were afloat. She was not personally known to more than a score of the idlers who made the round of the Pincio in the December sunset; but that mattered very little. Every one knew
something about her, or had heard something about her; and women felt aggrieved that she should be so very presentable and so well dressed, and really did not look anything remarkable after all.

What was the use of being a genius if you looked just like other people? Not a bit. It was disappointing, it was commonplace, it was quite inexcusable; and they made up for it by stories all more or less *piquante*, and untrue. That, of course, did not matter. She, herself, was never likely to hear them, or notice their authors. This last fact added perhaps a little more gall and venom to the "*on dits*" flitting from mouth to mouth, and which, of course, were all very entertaining and amusing, and suitable to the Rome of—to-day

Rome of to-day has her trains and
tramways, and omnibuses and Cook's excursions. Are they better things than the old landmarks—the spell of silence and romance—the scholarly, simple artistic life that seems most suitable to those old Homeric temples where decay and civilisation have alike set their desecrating seal?

Better things—oh, no doubt; so are the Lady Powderpuffs—the long-haired aesthetes, the American heiresses, the heavy-pursed millionaires, whose money vulgarises the glories of art, whose high-heeled boots tread the Sacred Way, whose dyed gold tresses shine with meretricious light in the dusky archways, and deserted galleries, and tranquil ilex woods.

Oh! no doubt it is all much better and more sensible, except for the dreamers and the poets, who come to the Rome of
Virgil, and find—the prose of the nineteenth century!

But then, nobody asks them to dream or to write poetry, and if they will be so foolish——

Corinna and Madame Nina had been some two or three weeks in Rome. The Countess had felt somewhat aggrieved at first because her friend refused to go to an hotel, and insisted upon living by herself in what Madame Nina termed "a musty old dungeon." But Corinna was inexorable. She knew that if she stayed with her friend she would not be at liberty to choose her society, or employ her time, and she selected these rooms and furnished them with quaint and artistic things, and had palms and ferns in all the embrasures of the deep win-
dows, and the walls hung with old tapestry, and the floor covered with Eastern rugs, and a general litter of bronzes and casts, and statuettes and books, until Madame Nina declared she would never have recognised the place again.

"Of course you will receive; just one day in the week—what is that?" she said, when the great, dim frescoed chamber was at last arranged to the satisfaction of its occupant.

"I suppose I must," Corinna promised reluctantly, as she looked at the heaps of cards and letters piled on a marble console. "It will be a great bore."

"Only one day," continued Madame Nina. "And I will always help you. There will be a crowd, of course. That is always so when one is celebrated. But
if you live like a hermit here, carissima, people will say all sorts of funny things about you."

"I don't care what people say," answered Corinna.

"Ah, but you ought to. That is foolish. When one is clever like you, and lives alone, and is so strange and unsocial, one is sure to be talked about. And to be talked about is always bad for a woman, especially if she be beautiful and—unmarried. Of course if you have a husband it is different. People can say what they like, if he does not hear it, or—mind it."

"Well," said Corinna impatiently. "They can come."

"You are not a bit like a Frenchwoman," said Madame Nina, shrugging her shoulders in despair. "And to think
what a success you might make yourself!"

"Should I be any better off, any happier if I were—a success?" demanded Corinna.

"I should say—decidedly," answered her friend. "Success is power—greatness—everything. You have it in a way; why not cultivate it socially?"

"A waste of time," murmured Corinna.

"You call everything a waste of time, except your books and your writings," said Madame Nina impatiently. "As for men—I'm sure the way you treated that poor Loris—it was disgraceful."

A sudden flush rose to Corinna's face.

"My dear Nina, what will you accuse me of next?" she exclaimed. "Count Fedoroff was your admirer and friend, and I understood that you quarrelled with him."
"WHOSE WORDS HAD POWER." 179

"Ah, but on your account! And he was my friend. Oh, yes, certainly he was that; but it was you for whom he cared. I could see that—very soon."

Corinna flushed again; her eyes looked indignant.

"You know I object to such jests," she said coldly; "and I scarcely spoke to Count Fedoroff!"

"Ma chère!" laughed the Countess airily, "love doesn't need much speech. At any rate his eyes were very eloquent. You interested and charmed him. I only entertained him, and yet I can't look upon you as a rival."

"That is well," said Corinna, almost contemptuously, "for I would not dispute Monsieur Fedoroff's affections with anybody."

"Don't you like him—really?" ex-
claimed Nina. "You are the first woman I ever heard say that."

"He ought to be grateful then, I am sure. A surfeit of women's admiration, and all it entails, ought to cloy any man."

"But why don't you like him?" persisted the little Countess.

"Why—why?" murmured Corinna impatiently. "Oh, ma chère, how can I tell? I only know I do not. He is not—well, not manly enough to please me."

"Not manly enough?" echoed Madame Nina, bewildered. "Do you mean not wicked enough?"

"Are the two synonymous, then?" asked Corinna, smiling. "I fear my type of manliness is founded on something higher than a reputation for vice. I mean, fearless, frank, bold, with the true courage
that upholds right and honour in the face of scoffers; to whom life is something more than a place for betting, horse-racing, and playing with women. A man who is talented and ambitious, but with an ambition to use his talents for the welfare of others; who is strong physically and morally."

"Oh, I should think Longfellow's 'Village Blacksmith' would suit you," interrupted Madame Nina. "In the name of wonder, my child, where do you pick up such extraordinary ideas? You will never find a man like that in society—never."

"I do not think I said I would look for him—there," said Corinna calmly. "There are plenty of men, my dear Nina, outside the pale of fashion. Men, perhaps, in a nobler and truer sense of the word
than evidently it has been your fate to meet."

"Oh, I should not like a man who was dreadfully in earnest," murmured little Madame Nina prosaically. "Raoul was that, and I thought it would be very fatiguing to live up to his standard. But let us go back to ce cher Loris. Do you know why he left so suddenly?"

"He received an urgent summons to Paris. You know that as well as I do."

"He said he did. But I know he never went to Paris at all."

"Where then?"

"To Vienna. Between you and myself, Corinna, I am afraid he is not quite a free agent."

"How? What do you mean?" asked Corinna, in surprise.

"I mean that he either belongs to, or
is watched by one of those secret societies one hears so much of. For aught I know he himself may be a Nihilist."

"Oh, hush!" cried Corinna, with a shudder. "He—a Russian noble."

"Plenty of Russian nobles are Nihilists," said the Countess seriously. "My dear, I didn't spend a season in Petersburg for nothing. Ah, but one hears and sees terrible things there! The whole system is rotten and corrupt and arbitrary. As for Loris, I am sure he is in some political difficulty. Do you know," and her voice sank slightly, "I have dabbled a little in politics. I have friends who have friends in the Third Section, and friends who have all the secrets of the French secret police at their fingers' ends. I hear much—sometimes more than I wish; but, certainly, all that I wish. I learnt, for
instance, that Loris did not tell us the truth. He never went to Paris."

"Then why did he say so?"

"Why—why? Cara mia, if you begin to question the 'whys and wherefores' of a man, you will have a very tangled web to unweave. All the same, I am glad you did not take a fancy to Loris Fedoroff, for he would be a dangerous man to love. He does not hold his life in his own hands."

Corinna grew a shade paler. She was standing in one of the embrasures of the great windows, and the faint light of the sunset stole in, and turned her hair to gold, and threw chequered shadows on the floor where the Eastern rugs made spots of rich colour.

Madame Nina looked at her and at the room, and thought what a picture she
made, and wondered if, after all, it was better to give up society, and be clever and not frivolous—as if both the cleverness and the frivolity came to one's nature for the asking.

"It is getting late," she said, "and here I have been gossiping all the afternoon. I must have a turn on the Pincio. Will you come, Corinna?"

"No," answered the girl languidly; "not to-day. I am tired."

So Madame Nina went by herself, and agreed that, after all, Society was more amusing than cleverness; but Corinna sat there in the great dusky chamber, which only seemed to hold now the echo of those words, "He does not hold his life in his own hands."

Yes, it was as well that no woman should love him.
But something more like a sob than a sigh closed those long, sad thoughts, and she found herself wondering dimly where all the dreamful interest of her life had gone.

"I did not think he would tell a lie to me," she said sorrowfully.

Which showed, after all, that, clever as she was, she knew very little about men.
CHAPTER XI.

"Ere the song within the silent soul began."

ORINNA still kept to her habits of early rising.

While the day was yet young, and all the fashionables who wintered at Rome were slumbering behind their closed blinds, she would rise and wander off by herself, or with her dog Pierre, and take her way through the dusky, ill-paved streets, or over the bridges that spanned the murky waters of the Tiber. Rome to her meant something more than a name, or that modern resort which Madame Nina
declared as dirty as Cairo, as ugly as Brighton, and as crowded as London.

She did not care for the Pincio when it was thronged with carriages and noisy with the clatter of all nationalities, and converted into a scene having as close a resemblance to Rotten Row, or the Bois de Boulogne, as it was possible to imagine.

To her Rome was a dream of gods, and great men, and wonderful things of art. A treasure-house of the beautiful in its highest and noblest sense; of names which were as proverbs in men's mouths—in itself a spell to conjure the world and hold it with the sorcery that no other place or name possesses. But being all this to her, she loved it best in its hours of solitude and stillness; a stillness broken only by the splash of the fountains; the tread of a passing friar; the chant of
choristers from some open church; the music of a lute or mandolin from some wandering player. She never felt alone even in solitude. She had too much to think of, and dream about, and feed her fancies upon for that; and here at every turn, in every street, were legends, and wonders, and memories, and strange lore as thick as the golden tulips in the April grasses, as plain to read and hear for those who cared to peruse or to listen, as were the storied marbles that the city held.

She had walked further than usual the morning after her appearance on the Pincio. It was warm, and wonderfully mild; the bells were ringing everywhere; the silver line of snow upon the mountains was rose-hued in the sunlight. Towers and spires and cupolas shone in the broad rich bright-
ness of the rising day. The air was cool and sweet, fragrant with odours of gathered flowers, and stirred with the murmur of doves' wings as they wheeled above the dusky roofs.

She drew a long, deep breath, and stood leaning against the tall tree stems, forgetful of all save the beauty her soul drank in, as thirsty lips drink the cool, sweet waters of a spring.

The first thing that recalled her to ordinary life and its surroundings was the sound of horses' hoofs on the thick green sward. She leant forward and looked from her place of shelter at the intruder.

A man was advancing leading a horse. His start as he saw her sent his hat flying back; and standing there reining
in the plunging, restless animal, Corinna saw Loris Fedoroff.

For a moment she was too startled for speech. Then she was conscious that he had taken her hand; that he was looking in her face, while the soft wind stirred his short, crisp curls, and ruffled them in disorder over his brow.

It flashed across her suddenly—almost painfully—that she had never fully realised how handsome a man he was, till now.

"We are destined to meet in strange places," he said, and there was a wonderful gladness in his face and eyes as he looked at her. "I knew you were in Rome, but I scarcely thought I should meet you here."

"I still preserve my fancy for early
rising," she answered, releasing her hand at last from that strong, eager clasp that had set her pulses leaping. "I like to keep the day for work."

"You are at work again?" he questioned. "But you have only just brought out 'Hélène.'"

"I know; but what of that? The mood is on me. I must write; and here—it is like a dream of inspiration."

"You like Rome, then?"

"Like it, Monsieur! Where is your soul to ask that?"

"I deserve the rebuke; but then so few care for Rome now. It is spoilt. I have heard people say it is only one great imposture."

She glanced at the blue arch of sky
above the level plains of the Campagna, and then at the towers and temples of the Immortal City, and the great dusky pile of the Capitol, towering above the mass of roofs.

"Yes, I understand," he said quietly. "It could not be spoilt for you, because you remember its past and the glory has not departed; but for most people—— Is Madame Nina here?" he broke off abruptly.

"Yes," said Corinna. "Did you not know?"

"I know she said she was coming; but that is one thing, Mademoiselle."

"And doing it is another. Well, she has kept her word. She will be glad to see you, I am sure."

"And you?" he questioned, almost timidly.

VOL. I.
She looked at him a moment—then looked away.

"You are my friend's friend," she answered hesitatingly.

"But not yours? Is that too great a privilege to hope for, Mademoiselle?"

"I do not make friends easily," she said, somewhat coldly. "If my likes and dislikes are few, they are also very earnest."

"To confess that is to make your friendship doubly valuable. I shall trust to time, Mademoiselle D'Avisgnes."

She did not answer, only turned aside.

"I am going home," she said quietly.

"May I come with you—at least part of the way?"

"But your horse?" she said, glancing at the beautiful creature arching
its neck and pacing the ground with impatience.

"He must do as I will," answered Loris, drawing the bridle through his arm.

"He does not look inclined for walking," said Corinna. "It seems cruel to force him to keep pace with us. Nay, mount him, Monsieur, and proceed."

"Do you really wish it, or is it only out of consideration for Tsar that you speak?"

She flushed slightly.

"I was thinking of the horse, Monsieur."

"And I of—you," he said softly. "It is so long since we met, don't banish me immediately."

She looked up and met his eyes. She knew then that she had neither the power,
nor the will, to banish him, and in silence that was troubled and yet sweet, they took their way through the woods together.

"How is Donau?" she asked presently, as they sauntered on. "Did you leave him in Paris?"

"No; I have brought him," he answered. "But—I have not come from Paris."

"I beg your pardon. I thought you had been staying there."

"No," and his voice was low and troubled. "I have come from Vienna. Do you know it, Mademoiselle? It is a beautiful city."

"No; I have never been there," said Corinna.

"I remember you told me this was your first experience of travelling. I have
wondered often if you would keep your resolve and come to Rome."

"I generally keep my resolves."

"You are above the failings of your sex in most things; you don't even indulge in their darling weakness—caprice."

She smiled a little.

"I see no advantage in constantly changing one's mind. I like to know what I am going to do, and do it."

"Have you established yourself in Rome for the winter, or are you at an hotel?"

"An hotel! Oh, no; I could not endure that. I have taken rooms for myself. Nina calls them dungeons, but I like them; they are lofty and large and quiet, and they have wonderful old frescoed ceilings. They are near the Palazzo Colonna."
"And have you filled them with old pictures, and marbles, and tapestries?" he asked her, smiling. "Every one collects in Rome, you know; and everything is genuine."

"I have not purchased many things yet," she said diffidently. "I am scarcely judge enough. I know what I like and admire, but I fear the traders think I am only to be imposed on; and Nina makes such terrible blunders."

"Will you let me assist you?" he asked eagerly. "I am a tolerable judge, and I know so many of the dealers. They would not cheat you in price, or in genuineness, in my presence."

"You are very kind," she said; "but I fear it would be a tax upon your time. Besides, I always go out so very early in the day."
"That would not matter to me if you would only make use of me," he urged.

"Very well," she said frankly. "I must confess I want a guide and director in these matters. The imitations have been brought to such perfection, and are so confidently sworn to as genuine, that I get a little puzzled, and afraid to trust my own judgment. I have heard people declare those productions sent by Pietro Gay to the Paris and Vienna Exhibitions are really Giorgios and Fontanas. To my mind, any imitation, even the cleverest, has no charm."

"But is there anything really original? No doubt the old potters and painters copied in their time."

"Still they had love, sentiment, feeling, for their art. Modern imitation has
nothing of that. It is simply a soulless reproduction—turned out by machinery if possible. I suppose soon there will be no art, only manufacture."

"We live in an age of high pressure. You see, Mademoiselle, in olden times a man could devote his whole life to one single piece of work, content so that it was perfectly and thoroughly done. Who would do that now? They would think it only a waste of time."

"You speak as if you thought it so, yourself, Monsieur."

"I?" He laughed a little. "I am too lazy, too fickle to do anything well. I can criticise art because that is easy, and one soon learns the jargon of styles, and dates, and signs. It is different, though, when one feels. You do that, Mademoiselle, and art to you is an
emotion, not an opinion. Such a feeling is worth all my technical knowledge.”

“But at all events there is one branch of art to which you also bring feeling and power,” said Corinna gently. “To sing as you do, you must love, and appreciate, and sympathise with the sentiment of music in its highest and truest sense. In this at least you cannot deceive others, or yourself.”

He looked at her with a little surprise. “Music,” he said; “well, perhaps you are right, Mademoiselle. I do care for that; but even there I have to thank Nature, not myself. My voice is an inheritance. To cultivate it was only a duty, and one that did not need much exertion, or self-denial.”

“You are not giving yourself a very
flattering character," said Corinna gravely. "I should not have thought you indolent, as you say."

"But I am," he answered. "See how frank I am with you, Mademoiselle. You shall know me at my worst from the very first stage of our acquaintance. Do you think one is to blame for one's moral nature?"

"What do you mean?" asked Corinna, looking at him in surprise.

"I mean, can we alter our character, simply because it happens to be faulty, imperfect, unlovable?"

"But you spoke of being to blame for one's moral nature. That surely lies in our own power to alter, or amend. We are meant to struggle against what is faulty and imperfect—not meekly yield and be content"
"You have scarcely begun to live yet," answered Loris. "You have told me your life has been simple, peaceful, uneventful. You do not know what powers or passions are lying dormant in your nature, any more than you can tell what force, exterior or personal, will develop them. I sometimes think we none of us understand ourselves."

"I have often thought that," said Corinna dreamily. "I wonder on what tide of longing I am borne along when I look forward, as I sometimes look, beyond the emptiness and calmness of the present."

"Rest assured there will not always be emptiness, or content," said Loris, looking at her with that tender, musing regard that had power even now to trouble her peace.
She tried to treat it lightly, and smiled. "Can you foresee the future, Monsieur?" she asked. "If so, I hope you are not going to prophesy me any evil."

He shook his head. "I should not be bold enough to attempt that, Made-moiselle. It is impossible to face each other so fairly and openly that our natures lie bare to sight and knowledge. It is equally impossible to foretell what fruit the impulses and longings of our souls may bear. There are few indeed whose lives show a white, clear page like yours."

"How do you know?" she commenced — then hesitated and coloured as she met his eyes.

"How do I know of your life, you would say? You betray it both by your
writings, and your personal character. The evil of the world has not touched you. It hovers like a shadow over the pure light of your creations, but it does not hold them, rule them, compel them. Even love—that master passion of all human life—is to you but a dream as yet."

"You speak with great certainty, Monsieur, and yet you have but slight knowledge of me."

"That is true, but it is sufficient." There was such quiet confidence in his tone that Corinna could scarcely resent it. Besides, she knew he had read her correctly. That knowledge angered her, and yet she felt that to betray anger would seem childish. No one had ever spoken to her as this man had done, and he had not even the privilege of friend-
ship. She thought of the strange feeling—half interest and half dislike—with which he had inspired her, and yet she found herself compelled by some power beyond her own control, to think of him, wonder about him, listen to him.

"I am sorry my books do not please you," she said at last. "You have always found that fault with them—want of experience. Does one of necessity put one's own feelings and sentiments into one's work?"

"Yes," he said, unmoved by the petulance of her tone. "If one has genius at all. It cannot be helped; one must paint what one sees, feels, suffers. It is relief, it is solace; it is perhaps salvation. The mind preys on the body; it would destroy it, were such passions and emotions not able to find some outlet,
"ERE THE SONG WITHIN."  207

and genius so often means only—suffering. But do not think, Mademoiselle, that your books do not please me. Perhaps it is their very faultlessness, their too great exaltation of tone and feeling, that give me courage to criticise. But it seems to me as if your greatest work has yet to be achieved, and that at the cost of—"

He stopped abruptly. He caught sight of her face, and its grave displeasure seemed to check his frankness.

"Well?" she questioned and looked at him with something that was almost defiance.

"Pardon me. I am saying too much. I have angered you already."

"No," she answered quietly; "I like frankness, and I am sure you are speaking as you feel. At what cost
am I to achieve this triumph you prophesy?"

"I was about to say at the cost of that peace of mind you now hold so dear; the purity and faith of those dreams that now wrap your soul in such deep content."

"My triumph will be dearly bought, then?" she said, her voice low and troubled, and on her face the shadow his words had brought.

"You may not think so," he said, and involuntarily his voice sank so low she could scarcely hear it; "for you will gain so much that you will count even peace no loss."

There was a short pause.

"If I were curious," she said at last, "I might ask you how you have read me so correctly in such a short space of time?"
"You do not think me impertinent, I trust;" he said, anxiously. "I have said more than I meant. But if society has made me false, in your presence I feel the old habit of sincerity waken. I cannot tell you what is untrue—or what I do not feel."

"You are complimentary at last."

"No, Mademoiselle—only frank. That is a fault for which you at least might find excuse."

"I do not consider it a fault. Therefore there is nothing to excuse, Monsieur."

"You know," he said, still speaking very low, "there are some women to whom it is impossible to speak truth. There are others, again, who shame us into it; before whom the very thought of insincerity is banished. And now am I forgiven?"

"There has been no question of offence,"
she said simply, and looked at him with her clear, soft eyes—eyes that he knew had kindled with no human passion—through which a pure and lofty soul looked fearlessly forth.

"Thank you," he answered, as he drew rein and brought Tsar to a standstill beside one of the narrow streets. "And I may call on you, and play cicerone in the way of art guidance?"

"If you are sure it will not trouble you."

He looked at her for answer. Then took her hand and touched it lightly with his lips.

"I fear I must mount now," he said reluctantly. "But you are near your home. I think, early as it is, we should afford gossip for half the city did I walk beside you leading Tsar in this fashion."
"I am sure Tsar will be grateful for my departure," smiled Corinna.

"Then he cannot share his master's feelings."

"Ah, Monsieur," she said rebukingly; "is that the eau sucré after the wholesome draught? I thought better of you. The language of compliment is not that of sincerity."

"In one rare instance, Mademoiselle, try and believe it is."

His eyes looked down at hers, speaking a language more eloquent than any words.

Then a quick, impatient movement of Tsar cut short all further adieux. He raised his hat, and rode on bareheaded in the Roman sunlight, while her glance followed him with almost reluctant admiration.
That morning as she sat alone in her great, lonely chamber, she read over her sheets of MSS. with impatience and dissatisfaction.

"Of what use," she said to herself, "if they don't speak of actual feelings, or breathe actual passions? Imagination cannot touch humanity. And of character, what do I know? I might write all my life long, and yet there would be always something wanting."

She did not confess even to herself what that something was.
CHAPTER XII.

“What ‘Rome’ meant.”

“OH, my dear!” cried Madame Nina, rushing into Corinna’s room late that December afternoon. “I have such news for you. Why will you bury yourself alive? Why don’t you go about as I do? Who do you think is in Rome?”

“Monsieur de Chaumont?” questioned Corinna calmly.

“Yes—how could you guess? But he is so changed, my dear.” Madame Nina’s laments were charged with italics
just as her manners were charged with gestures. "He is quite old and half bald, and, only fancy, Corinna, he has grown stout—positively and appallingly stout. I felt as if I should faint when I saw him. Is it not dreadful?"

"Natural—if not romantic," smiled Corinna, idly sketching figures on a sheet of paper before her. "He was not young when you knew him first, so you told me, and his disappointment may have aged him."

"It could not have affected him much, or he would not have grown fat on the strength of it," lamented the little Countess. "And only four years ago. However," she continued more cheerfully, "he is not the only arrival. Our two friends from Allerheiligen are here—Fedoroff and
the Englishman. What do you say to that?"

"Monsieur Brandon?—are you sure?" exclaimed Corinna.

"Quite. Does that really interest you? or is it Loris?"

"I knew Count Fedoroff was in Rome," answered Corinna quietly. "I met him this morning."

"And you never told me?" cried Madame Nina reproachfully.

"How could I? You gave me no time till this moment."

"Did you speak to him? What did he say? Does he stay long in Rome?" asked the Countess eagerly.

"I spoke to him—yes," said Corinna, somewhat absently. "He said many things, and I have no idea how long he
is to stay here; I never asked him. I think I have answered all your questions now, Nina."

"But have you nothing to add yourself?" questioned her friend. "What brings him here, and did he go to Paris, or——"

"Oh, my dear," interrupted Corinna impatiently. "Do not suppose that I troubled myself about the concerns of Monsieur Fedoroff, or where he went, or is going. It has nothing to do with me."

"Ah," sighed the Countess, "you have absolutely no curiosity; but at least for your friends' sake, you might try and obtain some information when you have the chance."

"Can you not ask him about his plans yourself?"
"I can if he gives me the chance; but he is very mysterious and impenetrable."

"Why should you trouble yourself about what his intentions are?" asked Corinna, somewhat coldly. "They cannot affect you or your movements, unless, of course, you are afraid of exciting the jealousy of Monsieur de Chaumont."

"He is very jealous," said the Countess gravely. "I wonder if he cares about me still?"

Corinna gave a little impatient movement. "If he does he will tell you, I suppose."

"Ah!" sighed Madame Nina, "you are very unsympathetic about affaires de cœur. I wish often that I could see you fall in love. You would be very different then."

"Should I?" murmured Corinna, some-
what absently. "I do not know. You see I have not much belief in love."

"There is something decidedly wrong about you," said Madame Nina; "something wanting. It is so odd, so unnatural, so unfeminine to have no lover, and not to care about men. I see no good in life at all myself unless one has plenty of admiration, and a new adorer perpetually at one's feet."

"Tastes differ, you see," said Corinna tranquilly. "I should think that sort of existence terribly monotonous, and horribly troublesome. You can only marry one man."

"Oh, but marriage has nothing to do with it!" interrupted Madame Nina eagerly. "That spoils all. Of course a woman can only have one husband—at a time—but as for the adorers, why
she can have as many as she likes of them, and change them as often as she does her gowns."

"And you consider that an enviable existence?" said Corinna, raising her head and looking at the pretty little butterfly figure with something very like contempt. "Oh, Nina! I thought better of you. Love is surely something lofty, unselfish, sublime, if there be such a thing at all. What you speak of is merely a miserable hectic excitement, a pretence of sentiment as debasing as it is untrue. Better spend one's whole life, soul, nature, on one passion so that it be true, self-sacrificing, absorbing, than fritter it away on a score of frivolous fancies, whose only interest is intrigue, whose only root vanity."

"Now you are on your stilts again," exclaimed Madame Nina petulantly. "What
a very uncomfortable thing life would be if we all were so dreadfully in earnest. Besides, no man really deserves to be loved like that. They have had scores of affaires before they settle down; it is only fair we should have our turn, when we get the chance."

"Your code of morality is altogether beyond my powers of comprehension," said Corinna coldly. "It only shows, as I said before, that, after all, love is a feeling unknown to you, and such as you. I am not blaming you; it may be the fault of your education, your age, your society, or your nature."

"In any case you are very frank," pouted the little Countess. "I am sure I never thought I was so horrid as you make me out."

"Pardon me," said Corinna earnestly.
"You said things that, if meant, are a disgrace to your womanhood; if simply the echo of the society you frequent, are degrading to that society. I speak as I feel. I cannot be untruthful, even to please you, Nina."

"Oh, I know you are very good, and noble, and all that," answered Madame Nina. "But, my dear, we cannot all be like you. We are frivolous, we are fickle, we are vain; oh, no doubt; and we mock at what is grand and noble, because really it is so much easier and so much more satisfactory to be—ordinary. You would make life a tragedy. You are far too dreadfully in earnest over it. Now, most people look upon it as a comedy, and prefer sensation to emotion, jests to tears. It is really more sensible if you can do it. Great passions are a mistake. All
history proves that, from the days of—of—well, Fair Rosamond, and all romance says the same. To love very deeply is to be very unhappy, and very disillusioned, and have a dreadful end. Believe it or not as you please, but it is true."

"Even the dreadful end?" smiled Corinna. "My dear, we are getting much too serious, and you are losing your afternoon drive. See, the sun is nearly setting."

"I came to see whether you would go," said Madame Nina. "You are sure to meet them all. Fedoroff and Brandon and the English baronet, who is so rich and has published a book, or a poem, or something. He was with that dreadful Powderpuff woman last night at the Embassy reception. Such a pity you won't go anywhere, Corinna. People will
"WHAT 'ROME' MEANT."

think it so odd. Of course I know you don't care what they think, and never did, but still——"

"Still you point ever to that moral to adorn your tale," laughed Corinna. "Well, I think I will drive with you if you don't mind waiting 'till I dress. I have a headache, and the air will do me good."

"And I will introduce you to Raoul," exclaimed Madame Nina eagerly. "I should like to know what you think of him!"

"At the risk of destroying our friendship," said Corinna gaily. "Ma chère, I could not venture to speak of Monsieur de Chaumont to you. If he did not please me you would never forgive me. If he did—well, in that case you might be jealous—or I."
There was the usual crowd in the Pincio, jostling, staring, criticising, gossipping. The Countess Floralia stopped her carriage, and was soon surrounded by a circle of acquaintances. Most of them knew Corinna, but the knowledge did not seem of much consequence, for she scarcely spoke or looked at any one, being apparently more interested in the colour that the dying sunset left upon the hills, than in the costumes from Worth, or the latest vagaries of fashion, or the idle gossip that was chirped and chattered around her.

When she did turn her eyes away, however, they rested on the face of a man who was bringing his horse up to the standing carriage, and looking eagerly at herself. It was Gilbert Brandon.

The Countess saw him at the same
moment, and welcomed him warmly, as did Sir Wilfred Carew, who had just come up. Corinna smiled, and gave him her hand involuntarily. She thought what a contrast he presented to the men around—grave, thoughtful, with a sort of preoccupied look in his dark eyes, and that sense of power and earnestness on the grave, square brow, he seemed of a different nature and type to the butterfly crowd who gossiped and chattered there.

"I did not expect we should meet so soon again," said Corinna, as he stationed himself beside her.

A conscious flush rose to his face. "Did you not? It does not seem soon to me."

She glanced up, somewhat puzzled. Surely he had not come to Rome only to
see her. "Shall you stay the winter?" she asked.

"Yes." He felt he could not speak fluently or much. His feelings were too deeply stirred; his eyes were devouring the beautiful face that had haunted him every hour since last he saw it. He thought it even more beautiful; there seemed more soul in the great melting eyes—more colour, and depth, and life, so to speak, in the whole expression.

The fascination she had had for him deepened in her presence—it affected him almost to pain, and yet it held him awkward, constrained, uneasy. He could not speak on conventional topics, try as he might, and the more impatient and dissatisfied he became with himself, the more conscious was he also of these de-
fects. "She will think I am a fool," he said to himself impatiently.

Then rousing himself with an effort, he began to speak of her book—of his delight and admiration of it. He thought he had pleased her at last. The colour wavered in her cheek, her deep, soft eyes glowed with wonderful light, a smile curved the beautiful mouth. He drank in the changeful expressions with ecstasy—he fancied they were occasioned by his own eloquence. But suddenly a shadow fell between them. He heard her say, "Ah, Monsieur Fedoroff, is it you?"

He shrank back as if he had received a blow. "That Russian mountebank!" he muttered wrathfully. "He here too?"

He drew to one side and looked on with disgust and wrath plainly visible on
his face. It seemed to him that their conversation was charged with subtle meaning, and emphasised with glances that implied a perfect understanding. He felt as if his goddess was degraded, and yet he knew it was only his morbid dislike and distrust of the man that gave birth to such bitter feeling. Yet he had no cause to distrust him, and no possible reason for that spirit of antagonism that judged all he said and did in so critical and intolerant a manner. But all the same the feelings were there, deriving their origin from that hidden fount of instinct whence spring the sympathies and antipathies of our natures—the impulses that rule or wreck so many lives.

Madame Nina noticed his troubled face, and read its cause pretty correctly.
She would fain have consoled him in her own fanciful, airy fashion, but he was obdurate and would not unbend to her fascinations. Meanwhile Loris monopolised Corinna in that quiet, masterful way which set aside all other men, and held her attention at his will. He had at command a singularly graceful manner; besides, he could talk well when he chose, and he chose now.

Many women envied her that exclusive attention, but she was unconscious of the envy, or indeed of the monopoly, so gradual and delicate did it seem. If she had known that her complete forgetfulness of Brandon's presence pained him to absolute torture, the knowledge would have distressed and surprised her; but she was as unconscious of that as she
was of her own growing interest in this man who, she had told Madame Nina, was "nothing" to her.

The first steps of love are so gradual, so imperceptible, that when one looks back on the road that has been traversed, one wonders how the journey could have been made.

What was said or done in that December sunset before that crowd of idlers, that could in any way mark the hour or the day with a newer and tenderer meaning than any other hour or day had hitherto known?

What?

Corinna could not have said; only her thoughts lingered dreamily, almost tenderly over its memory as she sat alone in her great frescoed chamber that night—only
the silent, irresistible magnetism of one presence seemed about her even there.

She thought of low murmured words—of the homage of eyes only too eloquent in that one language which is unsurpassed by speech. She thought and thought, and the pen fell from her hands and a sigh parted her lips, and she pushed back the soft dusky hair from her brow with an impatient gesture.

"What has come to me?" she murmured. "I grow weary of my work—of myself. Is this all Rome has done for me?" and with that sublime self-deception which is one of love's most cunning weapons, she did not ask herself what "Rome" meant.
CHAPTER XIII.

"Drifting."

It is surprising how easily one drifts into intimacy. Corinna had consented to Loris Fedoroff's accompanying her in her art researches; and from that small beginning dated the opening of the tragedy that was to wreck her life.

It was very pleasant, that wandering in dusky streets and through dim old shops full of mingled rubbish and treasures—those idlings in art studios and painters' dens, up and down the high
staircases and vaulted passages where the sun never seemed to shine, and the hum, and noise, and vulgar, bustling life of the outer world was shut out and seemed a thing apart.

And Fedoroff knew so much and taught her so much, for he had been educated in the strictest and most perfect canons of art, and really cared for it; and the hours spent with him, though filled with aesthetic talk and generalities, seemed to her the pleasantest of her whole day.

She did not work much. For once in her life her thoughts and ideas were not at her command—her mind was unsettled, and solitude had less charm than of old.

"It will come—afterwards," she told herself, and was content to let the days drift by, and grew strangely gentle and patient, and felt her heart touched with
warmer sympathies, and her soul awakened to the needs, and cries, and aspirations of a common humanity, from which she had long shut herself out.

She dreamt less; she lived more; she even suffered herself to be drawn into that society whose very name she had shunned. She went into some very charming houses, and met clever and intellectual people, who welcomed her with true cordiality.

It is true they were houses where she always met Fedoroff, and people of whom he had spoken in terms of praise and interest; but of that she did not think, or if she thought, did not acknowledge as any reason for her changed life. Madame Nina looked on and drew her own conclusions, but like a wise little woman, said nothing; and Gilbert Brandon, too, looked on, and grew passionately resentful
of the influence of this rival, for whom he felt a growing repulsion.

All those brilliant gifts and talents in no way charmed or deluded him. He had accustomed himself to look under the surface of life and character, and it seemed to him there was an insincerity, a selfishness, a want of stability and earnestness about this man that marred those superficial attractions which seemed irresistible to most people.

"If she loves him it will ruin that beautiful, lofty nature," he said bitterly. "No man indeed is worthy of her, but he least of all."

This distrust and bitterness placed him at a disadvantage, and he knew it. In Corinna's presence he was never at his best; no man is, when a great, pure, and impersonal passion absorbs him. Besides,
his calm English temperament and prosaic English nature were almost unattractive when contrasted with the brilliance, the culture, the glow and fervour of a nature like Loris Fedoroff's.

Corinna liked him, valued him, recognised his sterling goodness and worth, but otherwise was unmoved by his devotion even though conscious of it. No flush of cheek, or thrill of heart, or beat of pulse announced his presence, or greeted his advent. The gentle grace, the tender courtesy, the perfect manner of that other who absorbed her thoughts, set themselves in silent array against the grave and almost rebuking sternness of Brandon. She felt a little afraid of him at times, and a little resentful of his dislike and indifference to Fedoroff; still she liked him, trusted him, and had an instinctive reverence for a
nature that she knew was very noble and very true.

But all these things count for so little when the glamour of love falls over the senses, so little beside that indefinable charm and delight that make the passing hours so glad, because of one presence they bring, one voice they hold.

As yet she was unconscious of her own feelings, and fearful of inquiring too closely into the change that had altered all her life. As yet she was lulled into a dreamy enjoyment of the days as they came and went; as yet no sea of flame arose between her and all that previous peace she had held so dear; but her soul was disturbed at times, and solitude grew distasteful, and into the untroubled calm of her life dropped the first stone that could stir its placid waters.
Women are strange.

They may honour great ability, and reverence knightly worth, and respect true manliness, and acknowledge how noble and great is a nature whose unasked love is all their own; but just because it is unasked, is it also undesirable. It has no power to touch, or charm; it cannot waken one throb of passion in response to all it gives; and then perhaps there comes another who has just the one charm lacking, who may be very unworthy, or very fickle, or very vile, yet whose power wakens the sleeping senses, and fills the untouched heart with love, and draws it to himself as easily as the magnet draws the steel, and is for it the heaven or the hell of all its life.

Yes—women are strange, but this power, this spell, this madness is stranger
still. It is like the magician's art, and yet unlike, in that it cannot be bought, or learnt by any human soul, though they should seek and desire it with all their strength and will!

Loris Fedoroff had tested his power too often not to be aware of its extent when he chose to exert it. At times a regret and reluctance came over him as he saw this proud and pure-souled creature swayed by his influence—bending to his fascination—attracted by those personal graces that so many women had found irresistible.

At times he said to himself, "I am not worth one thought from a heart like hers," and yet, knowing she gave him such thoughts, he felt a triumph in the knowledge, and could not deny himself the pleasure of still further testing his power.
It was unmanly, it was unworthy, it was almost base; and he knew it to be all these. Yet he said to himself, "She has slept so long, she shall waken for me—if I choose."

He knew, too, that the influence he exercised over her was one against which her reason and judgment rebelled. There were times when he hated himself, when he felt mean and ignoble before her eyes, when some word or glance awoke his conscience, and it stirred itself "like a dreaming snake," and stung him with sharp pain and bitter contempt; times when he said to himself, "If she knew me as I am—"

But then the lower nature asserted itself: rivalry, opposition, pride, all lured him on to achieve this conquest, and he knew—none better—that a woman who
loves, never does know a man as he really is.

So weeks drifted by, and Gilbert Brandon, eating his heart out in silence, and pain, and jealous rage, saw that his rival was winning his way to the heart of the woman he himself adored so vainly, yet, seeing it, was powerless to warn or save her.

Corinna was almost unconscious of the lapse of time. The days drifted by and became weeks, and days and weeks were alike filled with a dreamy repose, a content of all they brought, a sense of delight in this life that was so different from all her previous life, and the delicate homage she met and the attentions she received were less obnoxious than her dread of notoriety had once made them appear. Vulgar curiosity she could still keep at
bay, for she was exclusive, and difficult to please, and had a way of ignoring people of whom she disapproved, that was impossible to combat. A way that really was the outcome of perfect indifference and serene unconsciousness, but which was as hard to bear as any insolence.

She made many enemies, but that troubled her as little as the idle gossip that bandied her name from lip to lip.

"What can it matter what people say of me so long as I know it is not true?" she would answer when Madame Nina called her impolitic. "And why should I know people who don't interest me in one single particular, and who dress and talk in the worst possible style, and have no claim on any one's notice or tolerance except that they are rich?"
"Still, it is wiser not to offend people; one never knows what they may say or do," the little Countess answered, with commendable prudence. She herself never offended anybody, and was inundated with "dear friends" and questionable acquaintances, but then she was popular. Corinna was not.

She was very much admired, very much praised, very much sought after, but there it ended.

Women were afraid of her; men found her too cold and disdainful. The homage paid her as a beautiful woman she seemed to dislike—personal flatteries displeased her—in fact, she seemed to float above society in an atmosphere at once strange and chilling, and society gave up trying to understand her, and contented itself with
watching her, and inventing stories about her, and wondering why she was so hard to please.

Gradually it began to couple her name with Fedoroff's. Gradually it began to sneer, and smile, and gossip over their intimacy, as it had gossiped over hundreds of other friendships.

Madame Nina heard some of the gossip and laughed it off good-humouredly, but she began to say to herself, "Is she really falling in love at last?" and to wonder vaguely what Loris meant, and whether Brandon would retire from the contest, or fight it out to the bitter end.

She did not see so much of Corinna at this time. The latter preferred the artistic and cultured society of Rome, to that more fashionable, and frivolous, and pleasure-seeking set in whose vortex the
Countess Floralia was engulfed; besides which that fickle little lady was very much engrossed with her own love affair, for the Comte de Chaumont had apparently forgiven the episode of the cigars and fancy fair, and once again become her devoted attendant.

Therefore, as the weeks went on, they saw less and less of each other, and tête-à-têtes became of rare occurrence, for on their respective "days" they were always surrounded by a crowd, and engagements kept them apart at other times, even if they ensured their meeting.

At times Corinna found herself wondering how it was that she really knew so little of Loris Fedoroff, that with all his apparent frankness he really kept his private life and all that had filled its years, almost a secret.
He had been a great traveller, and his own country seemed to hold him by no ties of family, or friendship. At stated times he was compelled to be on his own lands. But he spoke of such times with distaste and reluctance. He always drew Corinna on to speak of herself, her youth, her tastes, feelings, and associations, but he revealed very little of his own personal affairs in return. She was more frank—more unrestrained in talking to him than she had ever been with any one she had known. As if to make amends for her previous harsh judgment, she now unbent, and let her thoughts and fancies have their natural play. It seemed to her that he could understand and sympathise with her as no one yet had done, and she was too unsuspicious to attribute his own re-
Licence to any motive for concealment. He was not inclined to speak of himself, that was all.

There was a large ball at the Embassy one night. She had been invited, but had declined to go. She had made up her mind to have one of her old studious, dreamy evenings. She had just commenced a new book, and she wrote now with an interest, a zest, an absorption born of new strange feelings that found vent and relief in her imagined personages, and their doings.

She had drawn her writing-table near the fireplace. The warm glow fell on the old tapestries and the carved chimney-piece, and the great stands of ferns, and palms, and bowls of flowers which filled the beautiful old chamber. She herself sat
before the blazing logs, intent on her work, feeling nothing of loneliness or isolation now. The door was softly opened, and a servant entered with a letter. She took it and laid it carelessly down—the writing was unfamiliar and odd-looking.

For some time she went on writing, and, absorbed in her work, forgot all about the letter. At last, in a pause for thought or inspiration, she laid down her pen and it caught her eye. Mechanically she took it up and opened it. As she read, her careless look changed, her hand shook, she turned deadly pale.

The letter was brief and ill-spelt.

"Madame," it said, "you are a friend of Loris Fedoroff's. His life is threatened to-night if he leaves the Palazzo alone,
or before daybreak. Yet this warning must never seem to have reached him, or the sender, who owes his life to his charity, will be suspected, perhaps murdered. He trusts all to you.

"One you have aided."

Twice, three times she perused the strange warning, and each time grew more bewildered. Her charity had been widespread, and perhaps injudicious; but trouble and poverty touched her deeply, and her heart could never resist the appeal of want. Yet, who of all the many she had helped and succoured, knew of her friendship with Loris Fedoroff, or could fancy she was a fit agent for such a trust as this?

And how could she warn him, how be
sure of his remaining at the ball till daybreak? She looked at the clock. It was on the stroke of ten—at eleven he would set out. There was a clear hour before her to work out a plan, but her brain felt numbed and bewildered; she could only think of his danger, of Madame Nina's strange hints, of the mystery of this warning, and of there being no possibility of its reaching him except through her.

White, sick, almost stunned, she stood there with the letter crushed in her hand, her eyes glancing wildly at the clock as it ticked off the passing moments, her thoughts straying helplessly through this maze of doubt, and anguish, and dread, in which she found herself cast.

Another knock. The servant re-
appeared. He held in his hand a card.

"Will Madame receive? The gentleman said his business was urgent."

The blood rushed back to her face. The name was that of Loris Fedoroff.

"Admit the gentleman," she said.
CHAPTER XIV.

"Woven out of hope toward what shall yet be done."

ORIS came into the great room with its solitary occupant. His face looked pale and troubled, but he greeted her more composedly than she did him. "Pardon my want of ceremony," he said gravely. "I find I must leave Rome early to-morrow. On my way to the Embassy I thought I would look in to say farewell. I knew you would not be there, and this was my only chance."

She pointed to a chair. She was trembling greatly. "You are welcome,"
"WOVEN OUT OF HOPE."

she said. "But your determination is rather sudden, is it not?"

"Yes," he answered, and his eyes did not meet her own, but roamed over the room with its tasteful arrangements, its glow of colour from the pots of flowers and palms that stood about among the marble columns, and in the deep windows.

"You have made it look like 'home,'" he said softly. "I see no room like it anywhere. I think I shall carry a picture of it with me wherever I wander."

"I am glad it pleases you," she said. "I too am getting attached to it. I fear my old château will look very small and dreary after such space as I have here."

"You are growing fond of Rome?"

"Can any one help it who lives there?"

"No one with a mind like yours, perhaps."
"Ah, do not talk of me," she said, somewhat impatiently. "This business that takes you from Rome, will it detain you long?"

"I am sent for to Petersburg," he answered gloomily. "I cannot tell when I shall return."

Her face grew pale, her heart gave one quick throb, then seemed to beat in a strange, dull, laboured way. For a time they were both silent. Fedoroff seemed gloomy and absorbed, and she was thinking of that strange warning, and wondering how she could detain him, or prevent his going to the Embassy ball.

He roused himself at last. "I am but a dull companion to-night, Made-moiselle; you must pardon me. I had not expected so abrupt a termination to
our pleasant intercourse. I cannot flatter myself that you will miss me, but I know I shall find a terrible blank in my life.”

She felt she could not reply. The words went home to her with too sweet and intense a meaning to be lightly answered. She rose and rang the bell and ordered the servant to bring in refreshments, and moved aside her writing-table, and asked him to come nearer the fire, the room was so chilly and so large.

He obeyed her, sinking into a low, deep lounging-chair beside her own, while the great hound Pierre raised his head and looked friendly welcome out of his honest eyes.

“I am going to be bold enough to ask you a favour,” he said presently. “Will you take care of Donau for me
during my absence? I may be only away a month, in which case I shall return to Rome. If longer——"

"I shall remain here all the spring," she said quietly. "I shall be very happy to take charge of Donau; but will he stay with me?"

"You are thinking of his trip to Allerheiligen—but he is attached to you, and he can scarcely follow me to Russia. So you stay till the spring—April, I suppose? Oh, by that time surely I can be back. But if it is troubling you——"

"Not at all," she answered. "I am pleased to have him."

The servant had brought tea and wine and fruit, and placed them on a table near the fireplace. She rose and went towards it. "What can I give you?" she asked.
"I will have some tea," he answered, glancing at the clock. "I fear," he added, "that the Embassy won't see much of me to-night if you are going to play the ministering angel in this fashion. How good of you to trouble yourself."

He took the cup from her hands, and she poured out another for herself, and they seated themselves by the fire once more.

The clock struck eleven. Loris sipped his tea in contented silence. It was very pleasant here, he thought — very much pleasanter than the crowded rooms, and babbling tongues, and whirling dancers whom he ought to join. This mellow glow of firelight, this great shadowy chamber, this beautiful woman sitting beside him; how homelike and familiar it
all seemed. He did not feel inclined to leave her presence, though he was quite unconscious that she was equally reluctant he should do so; that she was dreading every moment he would rise and declare he must go to this ball.

They fell into their usual desultory, easy talk. It was impossible to be awkward or constrained very long with Loris Fedoroff. Presently he drew the writing-table beside him, and began to look over the scattered sheets.

A sudden thought came to Corinna. "They ought to be copied to-night," she said, "ready for the post to-morrow. I wonder if you would help me?"

"I shall be only too delighted," he said, eagerly. "I am proud to be of use to you."

"It will take a long time," she said,
colouring faintly. "You cannot be at the Embassy till very late."

"Of what consequence? A wish of yours is more to me than all the balls in Rome."

"But your friends—will it not give them offence?"

He laughed. "Chère Mademoiselle, I have but one friend for whom I care. That is yourself. Come, set me my task and let me begin at once. I promise I won't leave anything undone, if I have to wait till daybreak."

"Till daybreak," she murmured to herself; "if I can but detain him till then, he is safe."

Of herself she never thought.

The clock struck twelve. Loris looked up with a start.

"My task is nearly done," he said,
with a smile. "But are you not tired, Mademoiselle? Do you always sit up working to such a late hour?"

"Yes," she said, indifferently, "when I have anything of importance to do. How rapidly you write, Monsieur!"

"This is a very beautiful story," he said, pausing and looking at her as she sat opposite himself. "It is"—he hesitated—"it is different in a way to those I have read of yours. It has more variety, more play of wit, more—shall I use that fatal word again, Mademoiselle?—more experience."

She coloured softly beneath his gaze.

"Perhaps I am gaining even that from—Rome," she said.

He was silent.

Again he bent over his work; again the scattered sheets flew from his pen;
again the clock chimed softly in the stillness:

One!

He rose from his seat and laid down his pen. "I have finished," he said, quietly; and all the time his heart beat stormily and fast; all the time he was saying to himself: "If I dared to tell her—if I dared."

It was so strange to find himself alone at this late hour with this woman he so passionately loved, but the strange part of all was that she never seemed to consider it so. She was as calm, as gracious, as composed as if she were holding an ordinary reception—as if this man were here in these late lonely hours, by every right that the world could acknowledge. The firelight had grown dim, the lamp was burning low, the great chamber looked
shadowy and full of gloom save just where
he stood by her side.

A sigh escaped him. "It has been so
pleasant," he murmured, involuntarily. "It
is like sacrilege to let the world in here,
Mademoiselle. You have given your own
individuality to your room. I can never
think of it apart from you."

As he spoke he lifted his overcoat
from the chair where he had thrown it,
and tossed it lightly over his arm.

"I shall still have an hour for the
Embassy," he said, and took her hand in
farewell.

It was cold as ice.

"You are chilled with sitting here,"
he said with concern, and stirred the logs
into a blaze and drew her chair nearer to
the great fireplace. "Let me bring you
some wine. It is my turn now to minister to you."

The light words seemed to stab her with pain. Involuntarily she laid her hand upon his arm.

"You must not go to the Embassy," she said, her face growing white to the lips. "I beg of you, I beseech of you, as the last favour I may ever ask—do not go."

He turned and looked at her amazed. Ordinarily so calm and self-controlled, she now seemed terrified, distraught, distressed.

"Not go?" he exclaimed. "But why, Mademoiselle? At least give me some reason. I am not particularly desirous of going there, but as there is time—"

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, wildly; "there
is not time! Go home—go straight to your own rooms if you wish, but do not go to this ball!"

"You have some reasons. You think, perhaps—"

"I think nothing," she interrupted, passionately. "However strange, however unaccountable my request seems, I beseech you to grant it. You leave Rome to-morrow early, so you said. Well—I only ask you to forego this ball. Is it so hard a request?"

"Not hard at all," he answered, looking at her with a strange light glowing in his eyes, "if I may stay with you."

She rose and faced him, a proud light flashing over her face.

"It was for your sake alone I asked this thing. Can you not interpret my motives aright?"
He tossed aside his wraps, and came and knelt beside her.

"You force me to speak, in spite of myself," he said. "You have heard something—you know over what pitfalls I walk. Your fear of this ball is a fear for—me. Is it so?"

"Yes," she answered, turning paler than before.

He caught her cold hands in his own, and pressed them to his burning lips.

"My empress—my angel," he murmured, passionately. "I am not worth a thought of yours. My life even is scarcely in my own hands. I read your meaning now. You are as far above all other women in your nobility of thought as in your great unselfishness. But I must think of you since you will not do so. Already I have stayed too long. I may have been seen
to enter; I may be seen to leave. Are you ignorant, or only—heedless—of what the world will say?"

"I know," she breathed faintly. She felt suffocated—oppressed. Those burning kisses on her hands seemed to thrill her veins; her heart's stormy beats frightened her.

"It is something to you whether I live or die," he went on. "Ah, God forgive me, I had not meant to say such words. It is one thing to idolise, to worship in silence—it is another thing to speak out that worship and that love. You are silent, Corinna; you look angered. Have I been too bold, or can you have been blind so long?"

"I—I cannot tell," she said, trembling, and she sank down into the chair he had placed for her; "only it seems impossible
that you should care—should think of me."

"Impossible! Have you no eyes to see your own beauty—are lovers' words so strange to your ears?"

She looked at him searchingly.

"Beauty! Ah, my friend, if it is for that you care——"

"Not that only," he interrupted, "though, indeed, yours is enough to win any man's heart—but I love you for your gifts, your beautiful nature—perhaps most of all, because you have never loved."

"You are right," she said, with a sigh; "my past has not been frittered away in idle dreams and fancies. No man has ever been dear to me."

"Is no man dear—now?" he whispered, and his eyes sought her own,
casting sweet trouble into her great earnest soul as they had so often done of late.

The heavy lids drooped ere he could read his answer.

"Listen," he said, and his hands closed softly on her own. "You are beautiful, and gifted, and great, yet sometimes it has seemed to me you are not happy. Shall I tell you why? You are a woman, and you cannot deny your nature. Yet it is a nature too noble to be the sport of a passing fancy. You are like a mountain flower—untouched, ungathered. You may have pitied the pain of wasted passions, but the pain has never hurt yourself. But when you love you will live. Have I not told you so often? Am I not right now?"

If this analysis of her nature seemed to her almost cruel, if it hurt her to see
the page of her pure heart bared to a man's eyes, and to hear its history read before her own, she yet knew that the tumult of joy, the soft, bewildered rapture thrilling to the very core and centre of her being, compensated for all.

A great love makes the proudest woman humble.

Her eyes sought his again, and the blood flushed her cheeks and throat.

"Yes," she said, softly, "my life seems like one long dream——"

The words died off in a sigh, but it was a very happy sigh. He rose and drew her into his arms.

"Tell me you will wake for me," he said.

The clock struck two.

* * * * *

"I must go now—I must leave
"Corinna."

you," said Loris. It was half-an-hour later.

They had taken no heed of the passage of time. It seemed but a moment to Loris since he had clasped that proud, beautiful creature to his heart and heard her murmured answer. But a moment; yet the clock softly chimed the half-hour in the silence, and he started as he heard it.

"I must leave you, I must go now," he cried, and in the twilight of the dimly-illumined room, her eyes sought his with wistful entreaty.

"Will it be safe?—these secret enemies—"

His brow darkened. "I must risk it. It will not be for the first time."

"It is terrible," she said, with a shiver.
"Oh! how can I part with you for such a risk? And for so long?"

"Is it hard, my dearest?" he asked, tenderly. "Ah—I read your answer by my own pain. But do not fear. I shall be safe enough. I will write to you and dissipate your fears; and I will send Donau to remind you of his absent master."

"You think I shall need that?"

"No; I know you better. I envy him, for he will be with you, and I, so far away. Yet now that I have such an inducement, I will move every power to abridge my term of banishment. I shall count the hours till I can reach your side again."

He rose, but she still clung to his hand. Everything was forgotten, save this
fear for the life that was dearer than her own. "If you would trust me—tell me—" she implored.

A dark frown gathered on his face as he turned from that clinging hold.

"I cannot—not now. I scarcely know myself what hellish agency is at work threatening me at every turn. I seem surrounded by spies; yet I am conscious of having caused no enmity. My movements are watched, my life threatened; but I know no more of the actual foe than you do."

"These terrible secret societies," she murmured. "Has it anything to do with them?"

"I belong to none," he answered, frankly, as he met her gaze once more. "Still, for all that I have seemed a marked man."
“WOVEN OUT OF HOPE.”

She rose from among her cushions, and looked at him with a sort of terror. “And with your life goes mine,” she cried, passionately, “since now I only live for you.”

“Ah, my own!” he murmured, and took her in his arms, and with sudden reverence bent and kissed her brow. “I shall have an angel’s prayers at least to ward off danger. And now let me go. Bid me farewell at last. Heaven grant no gossiping spies have seen me here, or every tongue in Rome will babble your name ere to-morrow’s noon.”

“I care not,” she answered, and her eyes looked up to his—adoring, passionate: the eyes of one transfigured by a love that laughed to scorn the world’s poor narrow scruples. “You are my world, my conscience, my all; and you will not misjudge me.”
"As I live—never!" he muttered, but amidst the pride and glow of conscious power, of his own supremacy over this great, pure-souled nature, a little thrill of shame mingled.

"How little she understands me!" he thought. "How little am I worth her love!"

But it was his, that he knew—his beyond all rival, or dispute.

And as he bade her farewell, he kissed her with something of a despot's pride, as well as a lover's passion.

The street was dark, the air struck cold and chill after that warm, flower-scented atmosphere he had left. As he closed the door a shadow crept out from an adjoining portico, a hand seized his arm with a grip of iron.
"A word with you, Count Fedoroff!" said a voice in his ear.

He started—his hand went to the dagger that was always hidden in his breast. Then he turned and looked at the man who had addressed him.

He saw the white, stern face of Gilbert Brandon.